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LECTURES
UPON THE
HISTORY OF ST. PAUL,

DELIVERED
DURING LENT, AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY
TRINITY, UPPER CHELSEA.

BY THE
REV. HENRY BLUNT, A.M.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN presenting to the public an American edition of these Lectures, the Publishers feel encouraged, as well by the great excellence of the work, as by its great popularity in England, and the increasing demand for it in this country. The style of the author has many attractions; his thoughts and statements contain a shading and qualifying to the exactness of truth, which are peculiar recommendations. These qualities, and the excellent spirit which pervades the Lectures, betoken the candour and thoughtfulness of the writer, inspire the confidence of the reader, and secure his good-will to the truth.

P R E F A C E

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

IN continuing the series of Scriptural Histories, which the author has now for some years past made the subject of his weekly ministrations during the season of Lent, he finds the difficulties increase upon him. There are, in the life of every man of God, recorded in Holy Writ, so many situations, temptations, and trials, of which he partakes in common with his brethren, that in minutely dwelling upon each as it occurs, the author feels there is an impossibility, at least with his contracted powers, of avoiding repetitions which may become wearisome to his readers. Notwithstanding this disadvantage, there is still so much of interest, and so much of instruction, in all that was done, and said, and written, by these great exemplars of our faith, that it is impossible not to take delight in following up the inquiry, so far as the light of God's word shall guide us, into the most minute transactions of their lives, and the most secret workings of their souls.

After the favourable manner in which the

other similar productions of the author have been received, it may be supposed that he feels less hesitation in committing the present volume to the press; the contrary is, however, the fact: every successive attempt of this kind only convincing him how much more is needed than he is able to supply, to render these specimens of scriptural biography the invaluable vehicles of divine truth, which, in other and abler hands, they might unquestionably become.

That it may please the great Lord of the harvest to shed upon the seed sown the life-giving dews of His quickening Spirit, that in His good time it may bring forth fruit, and minister spiritual food and sustenance to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness among the souls committed to his charge, is the earnest prayer with which the author accompanies this little work. And if he may look to a still wider circulation of it, he would pray that all, into whose hands it shall fall, may derive from these pages a clearer insight into that faith which alone can justify, and a greater desire after that holiness, at once its evidence and its fruit, so beautifully illustrated in the life and conduct of St. Paul.

Upper Chelsea, March, 1832.

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LECTURES.

LECTURE I.

Acts ix. 4.

AND HE FELL TO THE EARTH, AND HEARD A VOICE
SAYING UNTO HIM, SAUL, SAUL, WHY PERSECUTEST
THOU ME?

IN these weekly lectures it has always been my desire to consider particularly the younger members of our congregation; and I have, therefore, been led to select such subjects as may be the most likely to interest, while, under God's blessing, they may also tend to instruct and edify more especially that portion of my hearers. I trust that this will be my apology for the absence of all elaborate criticism, all deep reasoning upon abstract truths, and for the exclusion of many of those higher views of spiritual things, which might be more agreeable and even more profitable to some among you; and that you will bear in mind, not merely this morning, but throughout the course, that most valuable apostolical injunction, "You then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please yourselves."

The subject which I have selected for our consideration, during the present Lent, is the history of

that great apostle of the Gentiles, the most abundant in his labours, the most voluminous in his writings, the most successful in his ministrations, St. Paul. We behold in him so remarkable an instance of the power of divine grace, over all the opposing elements of an impetuous natural disposition, and over all the prejudices of education, that we cannot but hope there will be few who may not, under the divine blessing, profit by the consideration of some of the leading incidents in his eventful history.

We possess more information upon the early history of St. Paul, than of any other apostle, for we learn from his own lips that he was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, Acts ix. 11; xxi. 39; xxii. 3, and that his parents were Jews, Acts xxiii. 6; xxvi. 5, but enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizens, which had been conferred by the Cesars upon that city.* He had himself been brought up to the business of a tent-maker, according to the admirable practice of the Jews, who, in whatever rank of life they moved, invariably instructed their children in some useful occupation. So universal was this custom, that it is upon record that many of their most illustrious Rabbies, whose writings have descended to posterity, themselves followed the most common secular employments. We have, accordingly, an instance of a great and eminent critic, who was a carpenter, another an iron-founder, with many similar examples. It was, indeed, a well known proverb among the Jews, "If a man does not teach his son a trade, he teaches him to steal."

In addition to the employment to which we have

* Lardner, "Credibility of Gospel History," p. 1, b. i. c. 10, sec. 7.

referred, St. Paul had been well instructed in secular learning, as is evident from his allusions to the manners and customs of Greece and Rome, and his citations of heathen poets, as well as from the use of Platonic phrases in his Epistles. This, however, was not all: an elaborate religious education had been superadded to those instructions, and at the feet of Gamaliel, the great Jewish teacher of those days, St. Paul had become a Pharisee and a zealot.

It would be difficult to picture to ourselves a process less likely, according to human apprehension, than that to which St. Paul was subjected, to have prepared the way for a meek and humble, and self-denying reception of the doctrines of the cross. Pride of birth, pride of intellect, pride of knowledge, and, though last, the deadliest and the worst of all these serpents which are nurtured in the human heart, pride of religious profession, miscalled religious pride, all raised their hydra heads against the entrance of the Lamb of God into his soul.

Of St. Paul (or, as he was at that time called, Saul,) we hear but little in his unconverted state, yet that little is enough to appal the mind at the thought of the deeply-rooted corruption and hostility to God of the natural heart, under the most favourable habits, and the most refined education.

The first mention made of him in holy writ is as follows:—When the blessed proto-martyr, Stephen, had borne his solemn testimony to the guilt of his judges before the assembled Sanhedrim, and, in pursuance of their iniquitous sentence, was carried forth to be put to death for the name of Jesus, “the witnesses,” who by the Jewish laws were obliged to cast

the first stone, having disrobed themselves for the more active discharge of their horrible office, "laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."

How astonishing an introduction is this to the history of one of the most devoted of the saints of God! Picture for a moment to your imagination this first scene in the life of Saul, with which the pen of inspiration has presented us: it will assist you in forming a less inadequate idea of the power of divine grace, when you thus learn to appreciate the tremendous obstacles over which it shortly after so instantaneously and completely triumphed.

Behold the meek and lowly-minded Stephen, his countenance still glowing with that angelic lustre which had for a time awed even his bitterest persecutors into mute attention; his soul filled with the glorious vision which he has thus described before the astonished Sanhedrim, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God:" his heart supported by the felt presence of Him, whom his bodily eyes had in that beatific vision gazed upon: his frame sinking beneath the murderous efforts of his executioners, who were casting stone after stone upon that poor broken agonized body, and yet the blessed martyr bearing all calmly, contentedly, peacefully, and praying for his murderers, "committing himself to Him who judgeth righteously," and sweetly falling "asleep in Jesus." Now observe for a moment the chief spectator of this dreadful scene: "a young man," compelled by no necessity to be present, but delighting to gratify his animosity against the followers of the Crucified, and

rejoicing in the thought that he himself should soon become, instead of a mere spectator of such atrocities, an actor and a leader.

Can it be true, can it be possible, that conduct so guilty, so abhorrent to every better feeling, even of the natural heart, should form the opening scene in the life of him, of whose lofty attainments in spiritual things, of whose holy and consistent conduct, of whose glorious testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, we shall hereafter have to speak? It is most possible, most true. Then, blessed be God, who shall despair? who has sinned past forgiveness? whose heart is too hard to be broken by the power of divine grace, to be melted by the love of Christ, if this be indeed the first incident which the Spirit of God has bequeathed to us in the life of St. Paul? Am I now addressing any who have ever said, there is mercy with God, but it is not for me: there is compassion with Christ, but it cannot reach my case: there is a powerful influence in the Spirit, but it will never touch my heart? Then, my brethren, look carefully at this picture, and draw from it,—no encouragement in sin—but great and soul-encouraging views of the boundless infinity of divine love. There is mercy for the worst of sinners, for there was mercy for Saul: you cannot fear condemnation, where Saul obtained a free and full forgiveness. That God who was “found of him who sought him not,” Rom. x. 20, will surely not deny Himself to you who earnestly seek Him through the blood of his dear Son.

The guilt of Saul, great and heinous as it was in the incident to which we have referred, was not confined to his participation in that one dreadful deed.

"As for Saul," continues the inspired historian, "he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison." Not content with the objects of his fury, which were to be met with in Jerusalem, he determined upon following those whom the rage of persecution had scattered abroad, and for this purpose applied to "the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of *this way*," as he contemptuously called the religion of Jesus, "whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

Filled with the guilty feelings, which such an employment must have inspired, he set upon his journey: many a mile was he permitted to travel peacefully and uninterruptedly, until, at length, he approached its close; as the inspired historian says, "He came near Damascus." How little do we know what an hour may bring forth! While Saul was rejoicing in all the pride of an unawakened heart, and looking forward to the towers of that city, which, as he hoped, was so soon to be the theatre of his cruel exertions, in which he might riot uncontrolled in all the rage of persecution, the great Disposer of events had determined that there, in that very city, where Saul was expecting to eradicate the gospel for ever, even there should he be found the boldest promulgator of its mysteries, the most undaunted preacher of its truths.

Who will deny the sovereign power of God over the hearts of men, with such a fact as this before their eyes? Or, rather, how many are there in every congregation whose own hearts and lives bear abundant evidence to the same powerful influence, exerted per-

haps in a less conspicuous, but not in a less decided and unequivocal manner! Are there none among you, my brethren, who remember the day when you also "verily thought you ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," but who have now no higher wish, no brighter joy, than to live and labour, and if needs be, to die for that blessed Master, for that endeared and hallowed name? But let us hasten to the interesting particulars of the conversion before us. "As he journeyed, suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, Why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Saul, humbled to the very dust, aware now of the full extent of his guilt, trembling at the recollection of his sin, and astonished at the unparalleled mercy which had delivered him from its punishment, exclaimed, "Lord, what will thou have me to do?" I am now thy prisoner, bound with the bands of love, thy servant in a bondage from which I trust never to be released: freely command my services, for all I have, and all I am, are thine, and thine for ever.

How wonderful an instance of the power of divine grace over the strongest impediments! how complete an attestation—if the conversion of St. Paul stood alone in the inspired records—to the truth of the Christian religion, and to the supernatural means by which it was established in the world. We can imagine the skeptic saying, when told of the manner in which the early Christians were in general brought by the power of the Holy Spirit to become the true

and faithful followers of their divine Master, "I see nothing here which might not have been effected by natural means and secondary causes: the converts were men remarkable, if for any thing, for meekness, for cowardice, for weakness of intellect, for unformed and uncultivated minds: there appears, therefore, nothing surprising to me, that such men as these should readily have acquiesced in the humbling, self-denying, degrading doctrines of the cross; but show me a man, the reverse of all this, learned, bold, impatient of control, a clear and reasoning head, a well-stored and cultivated mind, with every opportunity for discovering the fallacies of the gospel, and every prejudice armed against it—bring me an instance of the conversion of such a man as this to a creed which he had already learned to hate, and whose professors he had actually begun to persecute, and I will agree that something more than natural means must have been needed to have made this man a Christian."

It is scarcely necessary to add, that we triumphantly point to St. Paul! Here is a man peculiarly unfitted by nature, by education, by prejudice, for the reception of the humbling truths of the gospel of Christ; and yet this man is brought, not by a long course of learned arguments, nor by the power of eloquence, but by the power and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in a single moment, amongst the most humble, devoted, loving, self-distrusting of His followers. Could flesh and blood have revealed the doctrines of the cross with transforming power to such a heart as this? Could human reasoning, or the mere force of moral suasion, although reiterated for years, have produced the effect which we have now

recorded? It is impossible. Do you seek, then, the means by which it was effected? Let the converted Saul himself reply; "By the grace of God, I am what I am." "God separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace."

Such is the manner in which this illustrious convert himself speaks of that stupendous act of divine mercy; he ascribes it simply and entirely to the free and sovereign grace of that God who, when Saul was, as he describes himself, "a blasphemer and a persecutor," "the very chief of sinners," "not meet to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God," "had mercy on whom he would have mercy, and had compassion on whom he would have compassion." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out."

Having thus marked the divine nature of the change which was effected, and traced to its only real source, the sovereign love of God, let us observe,

First, The great practical lesson to be deduced from the conversion before us; and,

Secondly, Its wonderful and instructive particulars.

I. The practical lesson to be deduced, from this, and every other case of conversion, whether apparently more or less miraculous, is a corroboration of that great scriptural truth, thus expressed by our Lord, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"—"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." This is the decree which has gone forth from the lips of eternal truth,

not merely against the blasphemer and the persecutor, but against every fallen child of a corrupt and fallen parent. It speaks to you and to myself. All who shall enter into the eternal kingdom and joy of our Lord, either have been, or must be, the subjects of this heart-influencing¹ change. The mind, which is by nature dark and ignorant of divine things; the conscience, which is not awakened by the spiritual requirements of the divine law; the will, which neither knows, nor desires to know, any thing of a conformity to God's will, must, like the mind, the conscience, and the will of Saul, be subjected to the enlightening, renewing, transforming power of God's divine Spirit.

We do not intend to say that there are none, like Samuel, sanctified from their mother's womb; that there are none upon whom, by the grace of God, a change of nature, as well as a change of state, has taken place at the baptismal font; we know we are addressing ourselves to baptized Christians, but so also were the prophets of old addressing themselves to circumcised Israelites, when they urged upon them the true circumcision of the heart and spirit; and, therefore, we do not scruple to say to many among ourselves, "Ye must be born again;" a change must pass upon many of you as astonishing, as supernatural, as entire, as that which passed on Saul.

This is not, indeed, to be effected in the present day by means apparently so miraculous as those employed in the instance before us; but inasmuch as every conversion is above the power of man, is indeed the exclusive prerogative of God the Holy Ghost, every conversion is a divine and supernatural work, flowing

completely and entirely from the sovereign grace of God our Saviour.

II. Let us proceed to investigate a little more accurately the wonderful and instructive particulars of the astonishing conversion before us, praying that, by the blessing of God, they may afford us some obvious and palpable tests by which to examine the work of grace in our own souls, and determine its reality and truth.

The first step, then, in the miraculous transaction before us, was a radiance, far above the brightness of the sun, bursting forth from that eternal throne, where God the Father dwelleth in "the light which no man may approach unto."

Under this symbol how clearly do we perceive the first step which the Almighty takes in the conversion of every human soul which is brought out of the deadly darkness of sin, and the gloom of Satan's kingdom. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness," says the apostle to the Corinthians, "hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The light which shines in the renewed heart, is therefore traced by the apostle to the fountain from which it flows, namely, the unmerited love of God the Father. It shines through the instrumentality of God the Holy Ghost, and leads directly to a true and believing sight of God the Saviour. Ask yourselves then, my beloved brethren, for I would most earnestly desire to render this a subject of useful self-examination, are you conscious of any such event as this taking place in yourselves? Can you indeed say with him of old, in regard to yourself, "The dark-

ness is past, and the true light now shineth?" By the light of that supernatural radiance, I have been spiritually, as Saul was literally, enabled to see for myself the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, as my Saviour and my God. This was the first effect of that supernatural light acknowledged by St. Paul: he says expressly, I saw "that just one." This must be the first effect in your hearts; you must "*see that just one*," and see Him with the eye of faith, as your only hope of reconciliation with God, your only way to the Father, your only guide to peace and to heaven, before you can become an adopted child of the Most High.

But further; the next effect of this miraculous manifestation upon Saul, was, that "he fell to the earth," overwhelmed with a consciousness of the greatness of the Saviour who appeared to him, and of his own guilt, and vileness, and nothingness. Mark here the second step in a true and scriptural conversion, a lowly, humbling, self-abasing view of your own heart, and life, and conversation; a view which throws all your thoughts of self-righteousness into the very dust, which lays you there yourself with all your virtues, and all your amiable qualifications, as one utterly poor, and blind and naked, waiting the will of your divine Master. My brethren, are there any feelings in your own hearts, answering to this effect of converting grace? Are you thus humbled, thus lowly, thus conscious that you dare not so much as lift up your eyes towards heaven, but must be content with the publican's humiliation, and the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner?" If you have

ever possessed one saving view of the Lord Jesus Christ, this must have been, for this invariably is, the blessed effect of it.

The lower we lie in self-renunciation, and self-abasement before God, the more certainly and the more highly will God exalt us in spiritual graces, and in eternal felicity.

But again: when Saul was thus humbled, he heard the voice, as he had before seen the face, of the ever-gracious Redeemer. "Saul, Saul!" were the first words which broke from the lips of the Saviour. When we address those to whom we speak with the deepest feelings of pity and compassion, we love to dwell upon, to reiterate their name, but never when we speak in harshness or in anger. So was it with our Lord in the days of his flesh: "Martha, Martha, thou art troubled about many things"—"Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, but I have prayed for thee"—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee!" So is it now in the kingdom of His glory; what a blessed proof that He is the unchanged and unchangeable Redeemer! Saul, Saul, though thou hast persecuted me, I love thee still. How completely, also, did this method of address realize the Almighty's declaration of old, "I have even called thee by name, though thou hast not known me:" and again, to Moses, "I know thee by name, and thou hast found grace in my sight." It is when the word of God speaks thus to our hearts individually, by the discriminating power of the Spirit of God, that the work of conversion is really effected. You may for years together be the members of a congregation to whom the saving truths of

the gospel are faithfully preached; but they may pass by you, until at length some awakening and alarming threatening, some comforting and soul-quickening promise goes directly with its blessed errand of light and love into the recesses of your hardened heart; until the message, from being general, becomes particular, and you are called by the effectual calling of God's grace, and the power of His love, from the world of the ungodly into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Our Lord continues, "Why persecutest thou me?" How tender, yet how forcible the expostulation? How entirely must this have sent home the conviction of sin, of this worst of sins, the sin of bigotry and persecution, to the heart of the humbled and terrified Saul! "Why persecutest thou me?" I who have loved thee with an everlasting love, who have laid down my life for thy sake, who have interceded with my Father that this worse than barren fig-tree should be let alone until I should "draw him with the cords of a man, with the bonds of love." Well might the astonished persecutor have replied, Lord, when I saw thee helpless and destitute, and persecuted thee, I did not in solemn mockery put upon thee that robe of kingly purple; I did not in cruel derision bind the crown of twisted thorns about thy brow: I did not nail thee to the cross; I did not taunt thee in thy dying agonies, or in thy last sad hour of burning thirst offer thee vinegar and gall: when persecuted I thee?—"Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these, my beloved followers, thou hast done it unto me."

O blessed union between the Lord and his re-

deemed people ! **Condescending declaration of a love which knows no bounds, infinite in extent, eternal in duration !**

If you, my brethren, are united to Christ by a true and living faith, how unspeakably great and blessed, and glorious are your privileges ! He who touches you—it is God's own forcible expression—“ touches the apple of His eye.” “ In all your affliction, he is afflicted : ” every word unjustly spoken against you, is spoken against your Lord ; every hand raised against you, is raised against your Master : every act of unkindness, every word of harshness, every false accusation, every “ trial of cruel mocking,” to which you are subjected, is placed to His account, and shall be returned a hundred fold, either here or hereafter, into the bosom of his opponents. For this is the unalterable declaration of your God : “ No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord Almighty.”

LECTURE II.

Acts ix. 16.

FOR I WILL SHOW HIM HOW GREAT THINGS HE MUST
SUFFER FOR MY NAME'S SAKE.

WE concluded the former discourse before we had reached the close of the wondrous circumstances which attended the conversion of St. Paul.

The last point upon which we dwelt, was, as you will remember, that most affecting remonstrance of our Lord, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

We commence, therefore, the present discourse, with the answer of the terrified and convicted Saul to this voice from heaven: "And he said, Who art thou, Lord?" It is impossible not to be struck with a reply so different from any thing we could have previously anticipated. Is this Saul, the blasphemer and the persecutor, who had made havoc of the church, and defied the power and contemned the name of Jesus? Is this the proud, self-righteous Pharisee, who now, fallen to the earth, humbled in the very dust, seeks the knowledge of Him whom he had so long despised; and seeks it from the Saviour himself, with every evidence of respect and fear?—"Who art thou, Lord?" and then, immediately upon the reply on which we have already commented, asks, with every feeling of humility and contrition, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

How astonishing a change, how wonderful an evidence of the Almighty power, possessed over the human heart by the almighty Saviour! How easily can that voice from heaven break the hardest heart, or soften the most obdurate feelings! Whether it speak in anger, or in mercy; whether it come into the heart, as in the case of the apostate Emperor Julian, upon the arrow of his enemy, obliging him, after a life of deepest enmity to the doctrine and person of the Crucified, to cry aloud with dying breath, "O Galilean, thou hast conquered!" or as in the case before us, stopping the persecutor in mid career with the language of remonstrance and love, equally powerful, equally efficacious is that heavenly voice.

They who have never heard it, know not in reality the Saviour from whom it comes; they who have received it in the love and in the power of it, have received that which flesh and blood could never have revealed to them, but their Father which is in heaven.

Let me, then, beseech you to inquire individually, my brethren, have you ever yet heard and obeyed this heavenly voice? It is not enough to be the mere outward worshipper of God, honouring him, and content to honour him with a merely outward obedience; but have you listened to the voice of the Redeemer, as he speaks to you by His word, by his providences, by His Spirit? Have you ever inquired, and not only of human teachers, but of Christ himself, "Who art thou, Lord?" Have you sought diligently, and prayerfully sought, under the guidance of His divine Spirit, an answer to that inquiry; and has the answer, as in the case before us, revealed Him to you as that Jesus, whom if you have not

persecuted, you have certainly too much neglected, too lightly esteemed? and has it induced you to cast yourselves in deep humility before His feet, and to say, from the ground of the heart, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

My brethren, this it is, and nothing short of this, to be a Christian. This is, in fact, the essence of a true conversion, an entire resignation and complete conformity of our will to the will of God our Saviour. It is not to take up an empty profession, not to bear a new name, but to become a new creature; to say, "Other lords beside Thee have had the dominion over me, but by Thee only will I (now) make mention of Thy name;" I will no longer consult my own sinful desires, my own vain and foolish wishes, my own corrupt heart; I will no longer take counsel of the world and its deluded followers; but I will, upon every occasion, upon the great and important transactions of my life, upon the trifling, and it may be unimportant avocations of every day, make Thy will, Thy wishes, Thy word, O my divine Saviour, my rule and guide, my object and my end. Let this be, indeed, the language of your hearts, and you are not far from the kingdom of heaven. He who is thus invited to bear rule within your breasts will accept the proffered sovereignty, and will come with heavenly peace and joy, and healing on his wings.

Proceed we to consider the reply of our Lord, to his deeply humbled, deeply penitent, and now converted persecutor. "The Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." How remarkable a change is manifested in this answer of our divine Saviour! While

Saul was hurrying forward to the completion of his dreadful purpose, to the ruin of his own soul, the Saviour calls to him in the accents of compassionate tenderness, as in haste to Abraham of old, to stay his hand; condescends even to expostulate with him as a man remonstrates with a misguided friend, who is hastening to his ruin; "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." As if a tender mother were to see her child running with headlong speed to the edge of a precipice, over which, if permitted to proceed, he must unquestionably fall, her first impulse would be, however she might afterwards chide or even punish it—the first fond feeling of that mother's heart would be, to snatch it up in her arms, and to clasp it to her bosom. So did our Lord to the impetuous and misguided Saul. But now that the work of mercy is effected, the guilty purpose checked, the sinner reclaimed, the heart converted, our Lord appears instantly to have resumed the majesty and dignity of His kingly office. He speaks no longer as Jesus of Nazareth, the despised and persecuted Messiah, but as the same Jesus seated on his Father's throne, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He speaks in the voice of authority and command; "Arise, and go into the city." That city which thou hadst intended to have entered in all the pride of a powerful persecutor, enter a poor, blind, conscience-stricken man, requiring assistance and guidance of his companions; and there learn within those walls, the truth as it is in Jesus; there thou shalt be told every thing that is needful; not only what I will have thee to do, and what I will have thee to believe, but what I will have thee to suffer.

It was thus that the Lord vindicated His insulted honour, His persecuted followers, His despised word. A single beam from the light in which the Saviour dwelleth, might, and in a moment would, have revealed all, and more than all, that the strongest mind could bear, and the longest life could suffer; but this is not the way in which the Almighty works. All that needed miraculous interference, the arrest of Saul's guilty progress, the conversion of his heart, is done by miraculous interference; all that could be effected by merely human means and human instrumentality, is left to human means and human instrumentality to perform. Look not then for miracles, my brethren, where the ordinary operations of God's providence are sufficient. A constant necessity to violate the established laws of nature's God, would argue infinitely more of ignorance and weakness, with humility be it spoken, in the great Jehovah, than of wisdom and of strength.

"It shall be told thee." Not by me, not in a voice from heaven, not by some angel messenger, specially sent down to instruct and enlighten Saul; but by some poor, unknown, ignoble disciple, one of "*that way*," which thou hadst intended to persecute to the death; one who has himself learnt by the appointed means of grace, and by constant application at the throne of grace, all that he shall be commissioned to teach thee. Thou shalt learn lesson by lesson, and word by word, and syllable by syllable, as the poorest, and weakest, and most uninstructed of my followers, until all the pride of thy vast intellect, and all the powers of thy great mind, shall be humbled in the dust, and thou shalt have been taught to "count all things but loss,

for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus thy Lord." Thus does God destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent, that no flesh should glory in His presence; but that he that glorieth may glory in the Lord.

Let us now inquire what had become, during these most interesting moments, of Saul's equally guilty companions! They also saw the light; they also heard the voice; were they also penitent, humble, subdued, converted? No; we have, at least, no record that they were. This was no common manifestation of God's power and mercy, which we have been describing; it was one of those high days on which, as at the coronation or espousals of some earthly prince, the greatest criminals are pardoned, the most powerful rebels are set free; so here, the greatest and most hardened sinner of that wicked company was selected to be made the monument of redeeming love, the chosen vessel of God's sovereign grace; while the rest were left to the common means of grace, and the daily benignities of the Spirit of God. Observe, then, the manner in which the treatment of his companions differed from that of Saul on this great occasion. They also "heard the voice," but heard it as the people heard that voice which came from heaven to Jesus, during the days of his flesh, so faintly, so indistinctly, that "they said it thundered." They also beheld that divine light, but the evangelist expressly says, "They saw no man;" no vision was granted to them of the divine Messiah standing in that unearthly radiance; they were terrified and speechless, but not converted.

Remarkable instance of the sovereignty of God fulfilling His promise from of old! "I will take one of

a city, and two of a family, and will bring you to Zion." How often realized at the present day, and it may be in the present congregation! All hear the voice of the preacher, as all the company travelling with Saul heard the voice which spake from heaven; but, alas! how few hear it with that distinctness of apprehension which alone can render it valuable! How few, comparatively, receive it, in the love of it, into their hearts, and find it to be the power of God to their salvation; to how many is it, at the best, but an uncertain sound; neither "converting the soul," "nor making wise the simple?" to some may it not even be "a savour of death unto death?" to many, a mere pastime, "as when one playeth upon a very pleasant instrument?"

How many, then, travel in the same company, how few arrive at the same end; how many hear the voice, how few are brought to ask in deep contrition and in lively faith, "Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?" In the remarkable case before us, he who distinctly heard the word, and clearly saw the Saviour, was converted; and be it remembered, he alone. So, must we plainly tell you, it will be with you. You who accompany a patient and attentive hearing, with an earnest, prayerful, faithful "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith," you shall see what many prophets and kings have desired to see, and have not seen; you shall know what none shall know but they who thus seek knowledge at the fountain head, even that which our Lord himself has declared to be "eternal life, namely, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

Saul having arisen from the ground, still in dark-

ness as to his bodily eyes, although so miraculously enlightened as to the eyes of his mind, is led by the hand into Damascus, and remains three days in total blindness and helplessness: our Lord thus following up His purposes of mercy to his benighted soul, and by closing the eyes of His servant to the attractions of all outward objects, turning them inward the more searchingly upon his own heart, and upward the more unceasingly to his Redeemer's throne.

We now proceed to examine the remarkable means by which God effected his purpose, that Saul should be instructed through the instrumentality of human teachers, and that the good work which God had begun in him should be wholly perfected. We can readily imagine, that if it required a voice from heaven to convince Saul of the majesty and the divinity of the Saviour whom he persecuted, nothing less convincing than a voice from heaven would have satisfied the poor objects of his persecution, that Saul had undergone the wondrous change which had been effected; that the lion had become a lamb, that the persecutor was now an humble and inquiring believer. Accordingly, where miraculous assistance again was needed miraculous assistance was again bestowed. "There was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias." Not Peter, or James, or John, no great and eminent apostle need be sent for, to instruct the learned and highly talented Saul; but Ananias, some poor simple-hearted Christian, of whom the divine word has never before made mention, is fully sufficient in God's hand, to teach this most richly endowed of all the early converts. Believe then, my brethren, that

where the word of God is simply and faithfully preached, no want of gifts, or of talents, or of learning, on the part of a minister, shall frustrate the grace of God, or make His word of none effect. If Ananias could instruct Saul, and Aquila and Priscilla could teach Apollos, surely the wise ones of the earth may sit down quietly at the feet of the lowliest of God's appointed ministers, where the true light of the gospel is dispensed, believing, that "neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God who giveth the increase."

To the devout and holy, but in no other way distinguished, person of whom we have spoken, even to Ananias, said the Lord in a vision, "Ananias, and he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas, for one called Saul of Tarsus." Conscious, as we all undoubtedly are, of the omniscience of the great Jehovah, perhaps we are never so much struck by it, as when He thus condescends to demonstrate it to us in His dealings with ourselves, or our fellow sinners: calling forth one man by name, describing the identical spot where another lodges. How accurately does it mark God's knowledge of all our movements, of the city, the street, the house in which we dwell; how certainly, therefore, of all that passes there! How essential, then, that the Lord should be honoured and acknowledged publicly by us within our dwellings; that their walls should be perfumed with the daily incense of prayer and praise; that every word or action by which God can be dishonoured, or

His name profaned, or His Spirit of gentleness and peace grieved and frightened from our abodes, should be most earnestly, most scrupulously avoided!

But what is the language in which our Lord revealed to Ananias the employment in which Saul was at that moment engaged? "Behold, he prayeth!" Was this remarkable? Was it singular that he who after the straitest sect of their religion, had lived a Pharisee, should bend his knees in prayer? No. Had this been all, it would never have been bequeathed to us in Holy writ. Saul had unquestionably, for years together, performed these outward exercises of devotion, and repeated daily many a prayer to God; but now he *prayed*. The prayer of a converted heart, the prayer of faith, for the first time passed his lips, and was thus recorded by his God, "Behold, he prayeth."

My brethren, has your gracious Redeemer, to whom every action of your life, every thought of your heart, are most fully and entirely known, has he ever yet been able to declare this of you? You have said many prayers; have you ever prayed? You have joined even this day in many a confession of sin, and guilt, and misery, within these walls; have those confessions issued from a broken, a contrite, and a converted heart? We trust they have, we doubt not in many instances they most assuredly have; but if there be one among you who has hitherto contented himself with the mere service of the lips, who has neither sought nor received the Spirit of prayer and supplication, who has read or repeated morning after morning, and evening after evening, a form of sound words, which has not influenced the thoughts, and

the wishes, and the affections, have not been aided by the Spirit of God, and offered with a lively faith in the Son of God; let him learn, from the example before us, their utter uselessness and inefficiency. In the sight of God that man has never prayed. Begin, then, in earnest, this day; offer this very hour, before you leave this house, your first prayer, and the God who heareth prayer, for His dear Son's sake, will neither disregard nor deny your petition.

While the example before us may, by divine grace, be thus made useful in convincing the formalist, may it not also be applied in comforting the humble penitent? Your heart has been really touched by the quickening power of God's good Spirit; you have been humbled and proved, to show you "the plague of your own heart," 1 Kings viii. 38, and to lead you to the fountain opened for its healing. You have oft-times withdrawn from the bustle of the world around you, and when no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, you have poured out your soul in the retirement of your own chamber before your God. Perhaps you have sometimes risen from your knees with your soul but little refreshed, with a heart but little comforted, almost with the feeling that such poor, weak, faltering, faithless petitions have never ascended to your Father's throne; yet at that very hour, and of that very service, has your Redeemer said in tenderness and love, "Behold, he prayeth!" and has prepared an answer of mercy for your soul.

Ananias, alarmed at the well-known character of Saul, and afraid to visit him, remonstrates thus more naturally than faithfully with the Almighty: "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he

hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." Ought I thus to cast the pearl before swine? Ought I to endanger myself for that, which in all human probability is so little likely to improve or benefit him? "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of the Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

Saul had anxiously inquired, "What wouldest thou have me to *do*?" Our Lord sends his minister to tell him not what great things he shall do, but what far greater things he shall *suffer*. Sufferings are, after all, the great achievements of the Christian. Where one man is permitted to effect mighty things for his Lord by carrying the words of the everlasting gospel over the burning sands of Africa, or the frozen mountains of the North, thousands and tens of thousands are called to the high privilege of the Philippian of old, "not only to believe, but also to suffer, for His name's sake." To sit on His right hand, and on His left, are not now to be given; but to drink of His cup of trial and to be baptized with His baptism of affliction, are still among the choicest blessings which He bestows upon his people. Be not then disappointed, my beloved brethren, if with every desire to do great things for your divine Master, you are denied the power or the opportunity. If, as has been beautifully said,

"They also serve who only stand and wait,"

how much more do they serve who are called upon

to endure and to suffer! Yes, in the chamber of sickness, upon the bed of pain, you may as greatly glorify your Redeemer, as amid the trials of the mission, or the tortures of the stake. And often does it please your heavenly Father that, while you are meditating what great things you shall do for Christ, he is preparing the great things you shall suffer. Endeavour, therefore, to live in such a spiritual frame of mind, that you may be daily willing, at the bidding of your Lord, to take up the cross and to follow His footsteps, though they may lead you through many a toilsome track, or guide you through many a thorny passage. In your journey to the heavenly country, you must encounter trials, and troubles, and sorrows; no child of God was ever yet without them: not one of all that countless multitude in white robes, with palms in their hands, but "came out of great tribulation;" how can you, therefore, expect or desire to escape that, of which all the other children in God's dear family have so largely partaken? "Think it not, therefore, strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." Dwell much and frequently upon the views of that "eternal weight of glory;" it will tend more than any other consideration to teach you to form a correct and scriptural estimate of your "light afflictions." It was thus that the apostle of whom we are speaking, at a later period of his Christian course, was enabled to bear, and to bear without repining, an infinitely heavier load of suffering than will ever be laid on

you. He cast all his trials, all his sorrows, all his sufferings, into one scale, and after consideration of them, declares them to be light, and but for a moment. He then lays the glory in the other scale, and pronounces it to be ponderous, weighty, and eternal: "an exceeding weight of glory." In the one is sorrow for a little while, in the other eternal joy: in the one pain for a few moments, in the other everlasting rest: in the one is the loss of some few temporary things, in the other the full fruition of God in Christ, who "is all in all."

LECTURE III.

Acts ix. 20.

**AND STRAIGHTWAY HE PREACHED CHRIST IN THE
SYNAGOGUES, THAT HE IS THE SON OF GOD.**

Our subject this morning opens with the account of the interview between Ananias and Saul, for which both had been supernaturally prepared by the visions to which we referred in our last discourse.

“And Ananias,” says the historian, “went his way, and entered into the house, and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul.” What a salutation was this from one of the meek and lowly followers of our Lord to this “persecutor and blasphemer !” “Brother Saul!” Without reluctance and without delay, he acknowledges that man as a brother, whom God had so astonishingly acknowledged as a son. He requires no further introduction, no further testimony, but gives at once the right hand of fellowship, and with it gives his affections and his heart.

How does such an example, my brethren, put to shame the cold, unkindly feelings of the Christians of the present day! It is not enough for them to know that a man is a Christian, to induce them to acknowledge him as a brother : they must know every clause in his creed, every feature of his religious character ; they must hear him pronounce, with the most unquestionable distinctness, the shibboleth of their own party ; he must believe, not simply all

that he can discern in the word of God, but all that they can discern there, even to their latest discovery, to the revelation of yesterday, or he is no brother of theirs. Verily the bonds of discipleship are drawn so closely together in these our days, that a modern Ananias, instead of going his way and hailing this poor convert as a disciple indeed, because the Lord had said, "He is a chosen vessel unto me," would have replied, "Nay, but, O Lord, does he believe all that I believe? has he seen the great things that I have seen? of thy word? for if not, I cannot give him the right hand of fellowship: I cannot call him brother."

My brethren, beware of all such contracted views of Christian fellowship, which are daily dividing the seamless garment of our Lord into the veriest shreds and tatters; learn to make no distinction except that which the converted Paul himself made in after days, when he said, "Grace be with all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Let this be the broad platform of your Christian fellowship; let every minor point, whether of doctrine or of discipline, be merged in this—in every lover of your Redeemer recognise a friend; to the feeblest lamb of His fold stretch out a helping hand; to the weakest of His true and sincere followers, offer a sympathizing heart. Among the members of our Lord's blessed family, among the sheep of His "little flock," there should be no divisions, no distinctions: our language to all, however they may differ from us in the non-essentials of our holy religion, should be, if a chosen vessel, if a child of God, then a fellow heir of the same grace, an expectant of the same glory; a

brother here, a more than brother throughout eternity.

Ananias continued, "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost."

"The Lord, even Jesus;"—this must have been the first time that Saul had ever heard that name with feelings such as it awakened then. He had, until within the three preceding days, never heard it without abhorrence and execration. The last time it fell upon his ear in those celestial accents from that throne of light, it had come with accusations to his heart, as the voice of his enemy and his judge; it is now the message of a deliverer and a friend. After three days of blindness and trembling, without consolation and without food, he hears this message of mercy, "The Lord, even JESUS, hath sent me;" not to destroy, not to wound, not even to remind thee of thy guilt, but to restore thy sight, and to bestow upon thee the gift of the Holy Ghost,—“and immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales.” How blessed a demonstration of our Lord’s compassionate tenderness and almighty love!

It is thus, my brethren, that even at the present day, and at the present hour, the same Jesus binds up the heart, when broken with a sense of sin, comforts the spirit when oppressed with a consciousness of guilt, strengthens the bruised reed, and fans into a flame the smoking flax.

How often, although we see not (as we do in the present instance, since the visions of Saul and Ana-

nias are recorded,) the spiritual apparatus by which it is brought about, there is as much contrivance to send a messenger of peace to some poor nameless sinner, as there was here to the great and powerful Saul.

A minister, or a visiter, goes perhaps as he imagines accidentally, to the house of some sick, or suffering, or soul-stricken penitent, and is made the blessed instrument of carrying to that soul the message of peace and consolation. Can you doubt who sends him? When the scales fall from off your eyes can you doubt whose hand is there? No; though you will gratefully receive the servant, you will not overlook the Master who stands beside him. You will address your prayer to Him, "Lord, that I might receive my sight;" to Him, and to Him alone will you refer all the praise and all the glory.

The narrative continues—"and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized; and when he had received meat he was strengthened."

Thus was the work of mercy perfected; Saul, who from the moment he was struck to the earth, and cried, "Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?" had been converted to the faith of Jesus, was now bound to him by the outward ordinance of baptism, and blessed by the inward and spiritual grace of the Holy Ghost. "As for God," says the Psalmist, "His way is perfect." As it was with regard to Saul, so is it with regard to every child in his redeemed family, so will it be with yourselves. We do not mean to say that conviction is conversion—that no sooner are you made sensible of your sinfulness than all is perfected; far from it; there is often deep conviction

of sin filling the mind and agonizing the heart for a season, yet never extending beyond this first and essentially necessary feeling. But we must assert, because we believe that the word of God has revealed the comforting and consolatory truth, that where this conviction of sin is followed by a complete renunciation of self-will, and a simple heart-felt desire of conformity to the divine will, with a penitent believing "looking unto Jesus," as "the way, the truth, and life," there the Lord will, as David expresses it, "perfect that which concerneth you, and not forsake the work of His own hands." Like Saul, you may be left for days together in darkness and helplessness, but your deliverance shall come, it shall not tarry; the Sun of righteousness shall arise, and the dews of the Spirit shall descend upon you, and the scales shall fall from off your eyes, and you shall be brought to your Saviour and to your God, and united to Him with a love which shall never fail you, but which shall shine more and more upon your path, until it terminate in "the light which no man may approach unto;" where "you shall see as you are seen, and know as you are known." O, blessed consummation! full and ample return for all that you have feared, and all that you have suffered here: the first hour spent in that blessed place, in that beloved and happy company, will more, infinitely more than compensate for all the days of darkness which the gloomiest lot on earth has ever numbered. All will be forgotten in that first bright and happy hour; the toils of the way, the dangers of the conflict, the disgraces of many a defeat, the sorrow of many a short-coming, all, so far at least as affects their painful remembrance,

will be forgotten in those realms of bliss; and the love of Him who called you, guided you, kept you, sanctified, and at last glorified you, will be alone remembered.

The first public evidence which Saul afforded of the remarkable change that had taken place is thus recorded: "Saul was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus;" that is, with those very men for whose destruction he had gone thither he now associates in habits of intimacy and Christian friendship.

How complete, then, must have been the change wrought by the Spirit of God in the heart of Saul! If it had been said to him during the early days of his journey, The time is not far distant when you will confess, and love, and preach and die for that hallowed name which you now abhor, he would have started from the thought as from the committal of some deadly sin. But had it been still further added, Yea, within one week, you will desire no better associates, and no dearer friends than the poor, despised, illiterate followers of Jesus! Saul, the Pharisee, trusting in himself that he was righteous, and despising others, even of his own persuasion, but hating others when those others bore the name of Christ! would have almost replied with Hazeel of old, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this?" And yet, behold the change this little week has brought: we hear no more of the company of worldly men, of the persecutors, who travelled with him; we do not find them ministering unto him during his days of suffering; his only attendant was Ananias, his only companions, and his only friends, were the disciples of the Nazarene! He who had so lately persecuted

them even to the death, now said with Ruth of old, "Whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

Yes, my brethren, such was in effect the declaration, for such was really the conduct of the converted Saul. Great as was the difference in talent, in station, in attainment between him and them, there was one thing in common, and that one, the blessed subject which occupied every thought, and filled to overflowing every heart, the one strong bond of union before which all weaker ties were rent asunder—the love and the name of Jesus. Learned and highly intellectual as was Saul himself, he had now been taught to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord ; he was, therefore, well content to want all these qualifications in his new associates, which he had once so greatly prized, since he found, what far surpassed them all, sterling piety to God, deep devotedness to the Son of God, goodwill to every member of the family of man, spirituality of heart and heavenly affections, a life spent in God's service here, a hope full of immortality hereafter. So will it also be with you, my brethren ; if you are really reconciled to God, His people will be your people, His friends your friends ; you will esteem even the lowest, and the poorest, and the least informed of His followers with affectionate regard, for that portion of the image of their divine Master which you see reflected upon them, and are enabled to trace in their life and conversation. You will form your friendships and establish your intimacies among them, and them alone. A certain degree of intercourse you

may and must tolerate with the people of the world; but your hearts and your affections, the intercourse which you delight and rejoice in, will be as Saul's was, "*with the disciples*;" as David's, "with the excellent of the earth, in whom was all his delight;" with those who can help forward the life of faith and the work of divine love, in your cold and sluggish hearts. Believe me, you will need every aid, and therefore must not despise the smallest which God or man can afford you on the heavenward path; there are hills of difficulty, where the arm of a Christian friend may afford you great support; there are hours of battle, when his shield may be spread over you for safety; there are "sloughs of despond," where his hand may be permitted to draw you out. For although you must be careful never so to look, or so to lean upon any human friend, as to forget for a moment that "friend that sticketh closer than a brother," you may, and God has mercifully intended that you should, avail yourself of every innocent and scriptural aid, during your passage through this toilsome wilderness.

"Our backwardness is such," said an eminently pious man of old,* "that we need the most constant and powerful helps. A stone or a clod is as fit to rise and fly in the air, as our hearts are naturally to move toward heaven. You need not *hinder* the rocks from flying up to the sky; it is sufficient that you do not *help* them: and surely if our spirits have not great assistance, they may easily be kept from flying upwards, though they should never meet with the least impediment. O, think of this in the choice of your company! When your spirits are so disposed for

* Baxter. See Works, vol. ii. p. 240, fol.

heaven, that you need no help to lift them up, but, as flames, you are always mounting, and carrying with you all that is in your way, then, indeed, you may be less careful of your company; but till then, as you love the delights of heaven, be careful whom you know, whom you love, whom you delight in."

After speaking of Saul's first associates in Damascus, the inspired writer proceeds to speak of his first employments there: "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."

St. Paul began at once upon his high and heavenly errand. He did not satisfy himself with recommending a round of moral duties, with propounding a beautiful system of ethics; he did not content himself with declaring even that Christ was the Messiah, the Prophet that should come: he preached at once the great leading truth of the gospel, that Christ was the only begotten Son of the Father, truly and properly God, of the same nature and essence as God the Father, co-equal to him, and co-eternal with him;—the great truth for which our Lord was persecuted even unto the death, which every disciple asserted, and which the orthodox church of God has in all ages maintained. Saul preached this boldly and unflinchingly, and all the life-giving and saving doctrines which flow from it:—the great doctrine of the atonement, that Christ died for our sins, to purchase to Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works; of the resurrection, that He rose again for our justification; of the intercession, that He ever liveth to make intercession for us; of His coming again, that He may judge the world, and save His people. He knew, he felt, he preached, he gloried in them all. His heart

was full of Christ, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. From the subject which he then promulgated, he never afterwards even digressed; that boundless subject filled his thoughts, his heart, his mind, his sermons, his epistles, quickened his spirits during life, comforted his soul in death. It was his one, his only theme on earth—it has long been, and shall for ever be, his one, his only theme in the mansions of eternity. “Brethren, pray for us,” that something of this oneness of subject, this singleness of view, may be ours, that the Lord Jesus Christ, and him crucified, in all the length, and depth, and breadth, and height of this stupendous subject, may be the beginning, and the middle, and the end of all our ministrations.

While this was the apostle’s theme, we cannot be surprised to be told that he “increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this was the very Christ.”

If we, as preachers, desire to produce these effects, the confounding of our spiritual adversaries, the increase of strength in our own souls; if you, as hearers, desire to participate in them, be assured that we must be content with this one subject; and as the Reformers of old were contemptuously called, by the learned Erasmus, “men of one book,” because they read but the Bible, so we must be content to be called men of one subject, and to preach but Jesus Christ.

It seems extremely probable that at this point in the narrative, between St. Paul’s first preaching Christ in the synagogues at Damascus, and the persecution mentioned in the succeeding verse, the event occurred which is thus related by himself in the first chapter

of the epistle to the Galatians: "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb," says the great apostle, "and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, . . . but I went unto Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus; then after three years I went up to Jerusalem." Between the events of these two verses, therefore, three years intervened, of which the Spirit of God has given us no particulars, beyond the single fact, that during that period St. Paul withdrew for a certain time into Arabia, and this, as he himself says, "immediately" upon his conversion, not to confer with "flesh and blood," but to hold converse with the Father of our spirits, the God of light and truth; not betake himself to the broken cisterns of human instruction, but to draw the water, of life freely from the overflowing fountain. It was, doubtless, during this temporary sojourn in a strange land that the great apostle was prepared, by close and frequent intercourse with his God, by intimate communings with his Redeemer, and by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, for the arduous ministry upon which he had entered.

Surely, my Christian brethren, an important lesson may be gathered even from the little hints which have been thus left us of this long period of the apostle's course, namely, the absolute necessity, even in the most occupied walk of human existence, of retiring, at stated times, for more direct, and close, and intimate communion with our God.

Valuable as are the public ordinances of the church, improving as is the converse of Christian friends, be-

neficial as is the counsel of spiritual advisers; all these will fail of their intention, if they be not accompanied by occasional periods of absolute solitude, and more than ordinary intercourse with the great Jehovah. I do not now merely allude to the necessary and obvious duties of morning and evening prayer, I am advocating something more than this: I mean an occasional setting apart of hours to the great purpose of spiritual exercises. It is said of Luther, that with all the immensity of his labours, and the variety of his overwhelming anxieties, he invariably dedicated the three best hours of every day to God. This may often not be possible; but it is possible, quite possible, to enjoy far more than the generality of Christians even endeavour to do, of the presence of the Lord Jehovah. Without it your spirits will starve in the midst of the richest spiritual abundance, and it will fare with you in heavenly things as with the Israelites of old in earthly things; God may give you your heart's desire, in the abundance of outward ordinances, and yet "send leanness (withal) into your souls," Psalm cvi. 15.

There is a passage in one of the most eloquent of our prelates,* upon the importance of this species of intercourse with God, which expresses what I would recommend in language so beautiful, as well as so appropriate, and so likely to leave an abiding impression upon the memory of my hearers, that I shall make no apology for its quotation. "Prayer is the key to open the day; and the bolt to shut in the night. But as the skies drop the early dew, and the evening

* Bishop Jer. Taylor's *Christian Consolations*. See *Works*, vol. i. p. 145, edit. 1822.

dew upon the grass; yet it would not spring and grow green, by that constant and double falling of the dew, unless some great showers, at certain seasons, did supply the rest; so the customary devotion of prayer twice a day, is the falling of the early and the latter dew; but if you will increase and flourish in the works of grace, *empty the great cloud sometimes*, and let them fall into a full shower of prayer: choose out the seasons, in your own discretion, when prayer shall overflow, like Jordan in the time of harvest."

"Choose out the seasons," my brethren, but do not, because this may be done at any time, neglect it altogether. Many are the seasons when it is not only a privilege, but a duty: on the eve of great undertakings, as with St. Paul; in the time of doubt and difficulty, as with Daniel; when harassed and oppressed by temporal anxieties, as with David; when enjoying a peculiar share of the good things of this life, and of the mercy and loving-kindness of our God, as with Isaac; when under particular trial or sorrow, as with our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Your own experience will tell you, that there are few lives in which such opportunities are long absent, many in which they continually recur. Do I address any at the present moment, who are suffering under circumstances more than usually trying, who see no escape by human means, who know no refuge from human wisdom, to whom it appears equally arduous, equally impossible to advance or to retreat; the backward way closed in behind you with difficulties, the forward path hedged up before you by your foes: then thank God, and take courage, the upward way is still open, never so widely open, as when all other ways

are closed. "Cease from man," retire even from the company of the disciples, and betake yourself to God, and to Him alone; spread your case fully, unreservedly, before His infinite wisdom, and His infinite love; omit nothing in the recital; let your follies, your ignorance, your sins, all find a place there; "empty the great clouds, and let them fall in a full shower of prayer," and through the intercession of His beloved Son, your heavenly Father will send an answer of peace into your souls.

LECTURE IV.

Acts ix. 26.

AND WHEN SAUL WAS COME TO JERUSALEM, HE ES-
 SAYED TO JOIN HIMSELF TO THE DISCIPLES; BUT
 THEY WERE ALL AFRAID OF HIM, AND BELIEVED
 NOT THAT HE WAS A DISCIPLE.

AFTER the return of St. Paul from that sojourn in Arabia, with which our last lecture concluded, we find that he remained some time longer in Damascus, until the persecution in that city obliged him, at the close of the third year of his conversion, to seek safety in flight. The manner in which this was effected, is related in the chapter before us, and again still more circumstantially in the eleventh chapter of the second epistle to the Corinthians, where St. Paul says, "In Damascus, the Governor under Aretas the king, kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me; and through a window, in a basket, was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands."

When we consider the natural character of Saul, his undaunted boldness, his unquenchable spirit; and when we add to this, that the event before us happened in the early years of his apostleship, when the zeal and energy of first conversion were at their height, and when, as we have just been informed, he was preaching Christ with such success, that he was strengthening his friends and confounding his enemies; there are few circumstances of his history, which strike

us with deeper astonishment than this escape from Damascus. It was so little characteristic of the man, so contrary to the conduct of those who in after days, when persecuted for the same faith, crowded the tribunals, and contended with zealous but unscriptural anxiety for the honours of martyrdom, that we must seek the source of it in some deeper and more hidden spring, than the dictates of natural inclination or of carnal policy. Small as is the progress which we have yet made in his history, of this we are certain, that had St. Paul followed the natural impulse of his disposition, he would have infinitely preferred persevering in the labours in which he was engaged, although they should lead to the prison, or the stake, to this abrupt conclusion of them. My brethren, we find the source of it, for which we seek, in that great and blessed degree of conformity of his own will to the divine will, to which he had already attained. "When they persecute you in one city, flee into another," were the words of our Lord; directions which, in the infancy of the Church, were not merely most important to the spread of Christianity throughout the world, but essentially and absolutely necessary to its very existence: yet, at the same time, directions more difficult of fulfilment, from the self-devoted spirits upon whom they were impressed, than perhaps any other injunction of their departed Lord.

It will probably be said, that there is small need of such direction in these our days; and yet be assured,—and I now only speak to the true and devoted follower of the Lord Jesus Christ—be assured, that such counsel is not altogether unnecessary, even at the present hour; for however paradoxical it may

appear, we cannot doubt that it often requires far more faith to spare yourself at Christ's command, than to spend yourself in His service. Are you, for instance, engaged in active scenes of usefulness? do you find your highest pleasure in devoting your time, your strength, your talents, to promote the glory of God? and are you suddenly called away from such a station, and compelled to be silent and unemployed? —it is one of the highest efforts of faith to acquiesce patiently and cheerfully in such a dispensation; those natural feelings which yet remain unsubdued, even in the renewed heart, rise almost in open rebellion at the thought; their language is, I could bear any thing, do any thing, suffer any thing but this: how obvious is it, then, that this is the very trial most peculiarly fitted to you, this is just the chastening which you need, to bring you nearer in heart, and soul, and likeness, to your divine Master. But if this be, as it assuredly is, a grievous and difficult trial to every sincere follower of our Lord, how peculiarly is it so to a minister of His everlasting gospel! To be obliged, whether, as in the case of St. Paul, from hostility or persecution, or, as with many among ourselves, from a deficiency of health and strength, to leave the scene of his labours; to cease from those blessed ministrations, the greatest source of pleasure to himself if they tend in any, the smallest, degree to the profit of the souls committed to his charge, and to the glory of his Lord; to give up those duties in which his soul delights; to “stand all the day idle in the market-place,” while his more privileged fellow-labourers are sent to work in the vineyard; to be laid aside in a state of idleness and inactivity,

while others are permitted to "bear the burden and heat of the day"—yes, brethren, this is indeed a trial of faith far greater than the heaviest burden, or the severest suffering. In saying this, I am stating no imaginary case: it has been the salutary lot of many of us, for weeks and months together, to realize this painful truth. Let us, then, earnestly pray, that, while we have the ability, we may have the desire to dedicate all that we possess to this holy and happy service; that "whatsoever our hand findeth to do, we may do it with our might;" that we may have grace to devote our time, our strength, our labour, unreservedly to the great cause in which, as minister and congregation, we are mutually embarked; but that where they fall short, as, alas! they unceasingly do, infinitely short of that which our great and important duties require, or where they are, by the will of God, for a time suspended, we may possess sufficient confidence in the glorified Head of the church, to rely with cheerful contentment upon His disposal of us, believing that the salvation of His people is, from first to last, His own work and His own charge, which He has taken voluntarily upon Himself, and needs not such poor, weak miserable instruments, as we are, to carry to perfection.

Saul, finding that, by the will of God, the door of usefulness was thus abruptly closed against him at Damascus, proceeded to Jerusalem. He had been driven out of Damascus by the enemies of Christ, he was disowned at Jerusalem by his friends; for we are told that he " essayed to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." When we remember, that the

last time Saul had visited Jerusalem, he had been seen "entering into every house, and haling men and women, and committing them to prison," "for the sake of Jesus;" when we recollect that he had left the city "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," armed with a commission from the high priest to bring "all of this way bound unto Jerusalem;" and when we call to mind, moreover, the very little facility of communication which existed in those days between distant places, we cannot feel surprised that Saul was called upon to experience this new trial of which the evangelist informs us. It was a natural and a pardonable timidity in the disciples to stand aloof, for a time at least, from one whom they had so much greater reason to fear as an enemy than to love as a friend. No sooner, however, had Barnabas taken Saul to the apostles, that is, to Peter and James, who, we find from the first chapter of the Galatians, were the only apostles in Jerusalem at that time, and had declared unto them the wonderful conversion of which Saul had been the subject, than they cordially gave him the right hand of fellowship, and he was with them "at their coming in and going out." It is pleasing to see, that while the disciples, the body of believers in general, doubted the sincerity of the new convert, the apostles, the oldest and most experienced among them, were the most speedily reconciled. The warm-hearted Peter, in particular, must have remembered, that the days had been when the disciples might have looked with an eye of quite as much suspicion upon him as he was now looking upon Saul; when they might have been as justly afraid of him, who had

three times denied his Lord, as he could possibly be of Saul, who had persecuted that same Lord; when even his divine Master had implied either a doubt or a reproof in the thrice-repeated question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" He could not have forgotten how deeply "grieved" he had felt, that he should have been asked a third time "lovest thou me?" and the recollection must have opened his heart with a mingled feeling of compunction and love to the suspected Saul. Peter may have thought within himself,—If my master had been half as unwilling to recognise my repentance, as I have been to credit the conversion of this my erring brother, those tears of bitterness would have been followed by a life of misery and anguish:—and the very thought must have induced him to receive the converted persecutor with a kindness unequalled even by any other apostle, since none could sympathize so entirely with Saul as Peter himself. It forms a very pleasing and rather a striking corroboration of this view to discover, from the first chapter to the Galatians, that Saul abode with *Peter* during the whole of his short sojourn at this time at Jerusalem.

My brethren, be assured that there is no better proof of a real love to Christ in yourselves, than a willingness to hail with pleasure the first evidences of it in those around you. Do you observe, for instance, in any of your friends or acquaintances, an awakening desire after the things of God, an increasing love to Christ, an advancing knowledge or inclination to walk more "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world;" and have you known them under other and widely different circumstances? Be

not suspicious, on that account, of their sincerity and good intention now: having ascertained, so far as you are able, that they are in earnest, do not hesitate to encourage them in the good work: recommend them useful books; induce them to see and converse with their ministers; aid them to the utmost of your powers in that which must always be an arduous task—the commencement of a religious walk and conversation. It is truly distressing to think how many there are who have been, for a long time, checked at the threshold of vital godliness, by the cold reserve, or lukewarmness, or suspicion, of sincere, but misjudging Christians. If you would but consider, my brethren, how prominent and how beautiful a feature in our Lord's dealings with yourselves, is his readiness to receive the returning sinner, seeing him "while yet a great way off," and having compassion on him, and meeting him with every demonstration of tenderness and love, you would be more willing to receive an erring, but truly penitent and really converted brother. It is not easy to imagine how bitterly painful must be the feelings of those whose secret sighing has been heard by the gracious and compassionate Redeemer, and whose repentance has been accepted before God, to find themselves shunned and avoided by his, perhaps in reality, not less guilty creatures; to be looking to the same Saviour, and ransomed by the same blood, and sanctified by the same Spirit, and preparing for the same heaven as yourselves, and yet to be shunned, and discountenanced, and coldly entreated here.

We may picture to ourselves something of their feelings of disappointment and distress, by imagining

the feelings of Saul when he came fresh from the persecution and contempt of the Jews at Damascus, to cast himself, as it were, with brotherly affection into the arms of the Christians in Jerusalem, and found himself thus unexpectedly repulsed and rejected, every heart closed against him, every disciple afraid of him; this very fact alone, if the spiritual work within him had not, indeed, been a divine and decisive one, would have been almost sufficient to have made him once more "a persecutor and a blasphemer." We would, therefore, say to you, as the Almighty said to Israel of old, "Love ye the stranger, for ye were strangers in the land," strangers once in this good land, although you are now, by the undeserved blessing of your God, "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." "Ye know," by experience, "the heart of a stranger," its fears, its anxieties, its disquietudes; all the numberless difficulties, and perpetually recurring troubles, which perplexed your own mind and conscience, when first entering upon the heavenward path; therefore, feel for those who are placed by divine grace in the same situation, give them freely and unreservedly your sympathy, your counsel, your friendship, and your prayers; if there be nothing in themselves to recommend them, there is much in their present situation—*forlorn and destitute*—with many a wo, and many a temptation awaiting them; there is still more in their future prospects—*glorious and elevating*—when they shall sit down with you in the kingdom of their

Father; and most of all in the consideration, that every drop of that blood which was shed for you, was as freely shed for them; and that He who shed it knows no distinction between the strongest and the feeblest of those who are, indeed, His followers, since His own grace, and that alone, has made them what they are.

Saul having now, by the kind intervention of Barnabas, been received into the closest Christian union with the apostles of our Lord, began to "speak boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus" at Jerusalem, as he had before done at Damascus. He hoped, no doubt, that an enlarged measure of success would attend his ministry in this city, where his previous life, and habits, and education, were so universally known, and that the miracle of his conversion would here form an irresistible argument to the truth of his doctrine. Very different, however, are the intentions of God respecting our future disposal from the intentions of ourselves and our friends. Saul, perhaps, expected to spend many years at Jerusalem; the Almighty had appointed that he should remain there fifteen days.

How often in our own experience, and in the experience of those around us, do we realize similar disappointments! We fix our thoughts and hearts upon some wished-for situation, or perhaps some desirable connexion, and say within ourselves, Here will I dwell; here is a post of usefulness, where I may live and labour happily and profitably for the glory of God; or, Here is a quiet spot, in some degree free from the tumult and troubles of the world; here will I establish myself in peace and permanency. The thought has hardly been matured within our bosoms,

the words have scarcely passed our lips, when the sentence of the Lord goes forth, the cords of our tent are severed, its stakes plucked up, its canvass furled, and we are once more driven forth to resume our march amid the drought and sands of the desert. When will these things teach us to sit more loosely by the things of earth, to cleave more closely to the things of heaven; to believe that there is nothing durable, nothing permanent, but God himself, and those good things which He has prepared for them that love Him?

In the passage before us, it is merely said that Saul spake "boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; but they went about to slay him. Which, when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cesarea, and sent him to Tarsus." St. Paul himself, however, gives a far more circumstantial account of the same event in his recital of his conversion, in the 22d chapter of the Acts, by a reference to which we shall find that his short sojourn of fifteen days only at Jerusalem was in pursuance of a direct command of the Most High.

He tells us there, in the 17th verse, "It came to pass, that when I was come again to Jerusalem," after having left it to carry on the persecution at Damascus, and having been absent three years, "even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance, and saw Him, saying unto me, Make haste, and get quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee; and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and

consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." As if he had said, in answer to our Lord's declaration, that his testimony would not be received in Jerusalem, Surely, Lord, if they will hear any body, they will hear me, for they cannot but remember that three years ago I was as violent a persecutor as the most bigoted among themselves: when, therefore, they see the gracious change which Thou hast wrought in me, they will not, they cannot, close their ears to testimony such as mine!

Our Lord, who knows the hearts of his creatures, knew that such reasoning was vain, and therefore immediately replied, "Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."

How much better does the great Head of the church know the station adapted to the powers and labours of his ministers, than they themselves! While Saul imagined that his arguments would be unanswerable, his preaching irresistible, to the Jews, his divine Master knew that they would be valued and improved only by the Gentiles, to whom he was to be the appointed messenger. He, therefore, suffers him not to cast his pearls before swine, but to reserve them for those who, being "willing in the day of God's power," should cheerfully part with all that they possessed to purchase them. While the departure of Saul appears to have been productive of a blessing, which his presence at that time, and under his peculiar circumstances, was little calculated to promote, for the evangelist adds, "Then had the churches rest, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied:" a calm succeeded the storm which the appearance of Saul in

so different a character from that which he had once borne in Jerusalem had raised; the church had peace from outward enemies, and enjoyed for a little season a foretaste of that "rest which remaineth for the people of God."

Thus it is also, my beloved brethren, with ourselves. Our trials may be varied and numerous; wave may follow wave, until we are almost tempted to believe that they will never cease; and yet, amidst the darkness of the storm, our God is preparing for us the bright and placid sunshine. How blessed is the thought that even here such seasons are not unfrequent to the children of his redeemed family; that there are many moments of happiness which the world knows not of, in store for you; many hours of the quiet, peaceful enjoyment of the approving presence of your Lord and Saviour, of which even the humblest and poorest among you may partake, and in which the richest and the noblest well might envy you; many days, when engaged even in the common occupations of life, carrying the lessons of our holy religion into consistent and godly practice, you may possess "a joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not;" and all this not a forestalling of the peace which is in store for you, but a foretaste of it; not an anticipation in lieu of the reality, but an earnest of your future inheritance, making it only the more certain and the more dear.

But if these short and transient glimpses of the future rest be so delightful to you, what will be that rest itself? When you shall cease from sin, as certainly as from sorrow; when every burden shall be removed; when the whole church now militant, shall

have joined the church triumphant, and in one peaceful and blessed company shall unite in the heavenly chorus, "This God is our God for ever and ever," and we have found rest for our souls. May that Saviour, who has purchased it for us with His precious blood, prepare us for it by His sanctifying Spirit, and render us "meet to be partakers of this inheritance of the saints in light!"

LECTURE V.

Acts xiii. 7.

THE DEPUTY OF THE COUNTRY, SERGIUS PAULUS, A PRUDENT MAN, WHO CALLED FOR BARNABAS AND SAUL, AND DESIRED TO HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD.

WE found St. Paul, at the close of the last lecture, leaving Jerusalem, in consequence of a divine command, and retiring for a time to his native city, Tarsus. There he remained for several years, of which no record is bequeathed to us; but which were, doubtless, spent in promoting the glory, and extending the kingdom of that Redeemer to whose service he was now entirely devoted. When we say that they were doubtless so spent, we do not even feel that we are hazarding a conjecture; it was impossible for Saul to return to the place of his nativity, with a heart truly converted to the knowledge and the love of the Saviour, without sacrificing all he possessed to extend that knowledge and that love among his family, his kinsfolk, and his friends.

Nothing is told us of the result; perhaps there was nothing favourable to communicate—a prophet is not always honoured in his own country, and in his own house. But this will not deter you, my brethren, if you have obtained “like precious faith,” with Saul, from endeavouring to disseminate it among your re-

latives and friends; you will find it impossible to confine it to your own thoughts and your own bosoms, even were you so disposed. As we read of Jeremiah of old, "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay," so will it be with you. You may not be successful, you may not even be patiently listened to, but you assuredly will not be silent, your own heart will burn within you with the great and blessed truths you have received; whether those around you will hear, or whether they will forbear, you will speak, and love to speak, of the name of Jesus. Let me then ask, Is it so with you? When in the society of those, over whom you possess the influence of authority, or of affection, do you endeavour to employ that influence for God? Do you seek, anxiously, prayerfully seek, for opportunities of usefulness to their souls? We hear men of great business and occupation frequently speak of making time for every thing which they consider essentially necessary. Ought not, then, the Christian to make opportunities for a purpose such as this? Our great and spiritual enemy is never so much upon the watch to frustrate all intentions of usefulness, as just at the moment when an opportunity appears to be opening to us; while we are, when in society, perhaps timidly deliberating, the conversation takes some sudden turn, and all hope of promoting the spiritual good of those with whom we converse is at an end. This may be the work of Satan; but it is too frequently entirely our own fault, and our own sin, that it is so completely suc-

cessful. A little more resolution, a little more courage, or rather a little more faith, a little more love to God, and a little less fear of man, and we should have persevered, at the risk even of cold looks and uninterested hearers, and have at least cleared our own consciences, if we had not benefited our friends. We have no doubt that Saul found his residence at Tarsus the most difficult, and perhaps the least profitable portion of his ministry. Christians usually find that the most difficult sphere of usefulness is among their own immediate relations; but this is not sufficient reason that a true soldier and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ should shrink from his duty: it is rather a reason that, casting himself upon the strong for strength, he should persevere with redoubled energy. Would you know where you stand in the religious course, here is a trying test for you, a test to which, I fear, few of us can submit with comfort, or from which few can come forth with satisfaction. Can you return to the place of your nativity, or to your friends, your family, your husband, your wife, and keep silence willingly and habitually upon these great topics? Are they, in fact, the only subjects upon which you are not eloquent? and is this silence no matter of regret, of self-reproach, or self-humiliation, of constant confession before God, and fervent prayer? but do you satisfy yourself under the omission, with the thought that the time will come when you shall be more active, more bold, more faithful? If this be the case, look carefully into your own heart, and endeavour to discover whether the love of God in Christ Jesus have really taken deep and permanent root there: that it does not dwell there in any rich abundance, is

greatly to be feared; that it is there at all, if there be no compunction, no sorrow for the little you have done, or are able to do, or are striving to do, to promote it in those so near to you, is well worthy of your inquiry. We would not say, because we do not think, that in all such cases of culpable supineness, the love of God in Christ Jesus does not exist in the heart; but must it not, indeed, be a most tender plant, a most weak and flickering flame, a most uninfluential principle, if it can be content to carry but one soul to heaven, to add but one jewel to the Saviour's crown! God grant that the wo of the unprofitable servant may never be our own—"Take the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath ten talents, for unto every one that hath," and employs in his Master's service, "shall be given, but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

At the end of three or four years, which were spent by Saul at Tarsus, Barnabas, who appears from his first acquaintance with him at Jerusalem, to have conceived a very great and permanent affection for Saul, departed, as we are told, to seek him, Acts xi. 25; and having found him at Tarsus, carried him with him to Antioch, where he had himself before been the instrument of great and extensive usefulness. How disinterested an act was this on the part of Barnabas! By his preaching "much people at Antioch had been added to the Lord:" that he was not insensible to the delight of being so employed is obvious, for we are expressly told, that when he "had seen the grace of God" manifested in the conversion of sinners, he "was glad;" and yet one of the very first acts of this successful preacher, was to seek Saul, and to bring him

from Tarsus; to place him in the midst of the vineyard, where he had himself broken up the fallow ground, and then meekly and contentedly to take the second place, as we find throughout the whole history, he afterwards invariably does, and appear sufficiently rewarded by attending upon that chosen instrument of divine power, "the man whom the Lord delighted to honour." Most rare achievement of the grace of God, when it so completely triumphs over self-love, and self-aggrandizement, and self-applause, as to make this the language of our hearts: Let but my God be glorified, let my Redeemer conquer, and while other and more honoured instruments may fight under His banners, and advance His glories, and partake of the spoils of His victories, I am well content to be overlooked and forgotten; "less than the least of all saints," "a door-keeper in the house of my God."

At Antioch, Saul and Barnabas remained, we are informed, for a whole year, "assembling themselves with the church, and teaching much people;" making also one short visit to Jerusalem, to carry relief to the brethren during a time of famine, and bringing back with them, for their assistant, John whose surname was Mark.

Of these facts nothing but a very brief and scanty notice is vouchsafed us in Holy Writ; nor are any particulars of the subject of our present history recorded, until we are told, at the opening of the thirteenth chapter, that by the directions of the Holy Ghost, Saul and Barnabas were commanded to be separated from the other disciples, and to be sent forth to carry the glad tidings of salvation to the heathen world.

We now commence the history of the missionary life of Saul, a course adorned by more labours, and enriched by more sufferings, than the life of any other individual of whom mankind have ever read. The first important incident in this career of usefulness, was the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the Roman deputy of the Island of Cyprus.

The event is thus described by the evangelist: "Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God." This was the first of the idolatrous Gentiles, a Roman magistrate, a man of high rank and important office, to whom the gospel had been openly proposed. He is described by the Spirit of God as "a prudent man," and the evidence to this is his "desiring to hear the word of God." How remarkably does the application of terms, by the mouth of the Spirit of God, differ from their application by the mouth of the world! If we can conceive an instance of what the world would term the height of imprudence, we have it here. A Roman governor of high rank, condescending to send for the teachers of a new religion, for men who were preaching certain doctrines promulged by one Jesus, who had suffered as a criminal under the Roman governor of Judea, and desiring to hear from them the word of God! The strong probability that if he received it, he would lose not only his office, but his life; the certainty that if he even rejected it, he would seriously injure his character among his Gentile friends by the inquiry, would have been quite sufficient to have stigmatized him in the eyes of the world as a most imprudent and injudicious man. Yet the Spirit of God has declared this man to be a "pru-

dent man." And surely, my brethren, if there be meaning in words, the term is more appropriately applied: for can there be a better evidence of prudence, than, passing onward as we know ourselves to be, to a state of boundless existence beyond the grave, seriously to inquire, whether the faith which we profess, the religion to which we belong, be indeed the word of God, and sufficient to carry us safely into the eternal mansions? Would to God that every great man, and every rich man, and every powerful man, every governor, and every magistrate throughout the British empire, would evince the same measure of wisdom as this Roman proconsul—would at least devote as much attention and occupy themselves as earnestly, in inquiring into the eternal truths of the word of God, as they do to make themselves masters of the most common topics of worldly knowledge, or the most unimportant matters of daily conversation. Yet in the eyes of the world, an earnest desire after religious knowledge is the only weakness, and the only folly; and in the language of the world they who neglect it are the truly prudent men, the judicious men, the wise men; yes, in their generation, far wiser than the children of light. Alas! how fearfully in the great day of account will the Holy Spirit of God vindicate his use of the term, when all other wisdom shall be proved to have been folly, and all other prudence insanity, except that which leads its professors to seek diligently for the pearl of great price, and when they have found it, to sell all that they have to purchase it.

The rich and the great, however, do not only possess the same internal disinclination to an earnest

search after divine truth which we all possess, they have usually far greater external hinderances. So it was with the Roman governor of whom we are speaking. When the apostles, at his desire, came to him to expound the word of God, they found with him "a certain sorcerer, a false prophet," "who withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith."

This has ever been one of the snares and hinderances of the great—the class of people by which they are usually surrounded. If there even be, as thanks be to God, there often is, a willingness to inquire after the truths of the Gospel among the rich and the noble of the world, they are so hedged in by those whose interest or whose ignorance strongly influence them in "turning away" their patrons from the faith, that we scarcely need the authority of our divine Lord to assure us, that with so much opposition from without, and so much indifference within, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

This opposition, however, is not confined to the associates or the followers of the wealthy: and therefore, it is not in their path alone that this stumbling-block is laid. Wherever the Gospel is preached in all its fulness and freeness, there will too often be awakened the bitterness of hostility and hatred; wherever the Spirit of God is present to open the eyes of men, there the spirit of darkness will be present to close them. This is Satan's unceasing business, to "turn" our hearers "from the truth:" at one time he will carry his purpose into effect by implant-

ing prejudice against the doctrine, at another by instilling hatred against the teacher. We cannot preach the truth in sincerity, you cannot embrace it, without most certainly, sooner or later, feeling the envenomed shafts of malice and calumny: these are reserved almost exclusively for the preachers and the followers of the true gospel. A man may preach any thing else with impunity; he may uphold morality to the exclusion of spiritual religion; he may altogether omit, or slightly gloss over, every leading doctrine of Christ; he may even leave the very divinity of our blessed Lord rather to be gathered from what he has left unsaid than to be seen in what he has plainly advanced, and yet you shall not usually find that man opposed. But let a preacher endeavour to display the blessed gospel in its fulness—let him dwell upon the sinfulness and corruption of our nature, upon justification by faith in a crucified Redeemer alone, the necessity of a renewed heart, and of a separation from the sinful pleasures of the world—and let him do this even with every degree of caution, and tenderness, and anxiety, not to wound the feelings of any individual, and yet that man shall not escape the tongue of slander, or the finger of scorn. This, my brethren, is a part of the offence of the cross, we bear it in common with every apostle and prophet, and with our divine and blessed Master himself; we may not hope, we ought not to desire, that “the disciple should be above his master, the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple to be as his master, the servant as his lord.”

In the case before us, no sooner had Elymas withstood the preaching of the apostles, than we are told,

“Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?”

This, we may rest assured, is not one of those passages of Scripture which are written for our imitation, since nothing but the supernatural discernment and divine commission of the apostles would at all justify us in so speaking of any of the children of men. It is, however, equally certain, that in the instances we are considering, the apostle did not speak from the hasty or irritated feelings of the natural heart, but by direct inspiration; for we are particularly told, and no doubt for the express purpose of evincing the Spirit by which he was influenced, that at the moment he so spake, “he was filled with the Holy Ghost.” Be assured, therefore, that although “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God,” never are such strong expressions of indignation authorized in Holy Writ as when applied to those who would prevent the progress of the Gospel, or cast a stumbling-block in the way of any who are seeking an interest in its great and blessed truths. In reference to all such, our Lord has said, “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” The apostle’s reproof, however, strong and powerful as it was, did not stand alone; it was accompanied by an immediate and awful display of divine vengeance: “Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee,” he continued, “and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the

sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and darkness, and he went about seeking some one to lead him by the hand." How remarkable and how retributive a sentence! Elymas had willingly closed the eyes of his mind against the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and now the Almighty closed his bodily eyes against the light of the sun of nature. He had endeavoured to turn the proconsul from the truth, and to lead him into error, and now he is himself rendered so helpless and dependent that he gladly seeks some one to lead him by the hand. If there be a crime which even at the present day usually brings with it its appropriate punishment, it is most assuredly the crime of subverting, or endeavouring to subvert, of restraining, or striving to restrain, the work of divine grace in the hearts of those around us. Do you ever, for instance, behold persons anxiously solicitous lest those over whom they possess control should be guilty of the only unpardonable sin in the eyes of the world, the sin of being "righteous overmuch?" carefully guarding them, perhaps, from "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," but far more carefully guarding them from "the right ways of the Lord?" always fearing lest the love of God, and the fear of God, should take too complete possession of their hearts, lest they should live too much for the coming eternity, too little for the passing day? then mark the effect of such attempts upon the minds of those who make them. You will almost invariably find that they recoil in fearful judgments on themselves; that like Elymas, while endeavouring to keep others from the light, they are themselves visited with judicial and tenfold

darkness; while, unlike Elymas, they alone are unconscious of their calamity, and too often will neither seek nor accept a guide, until all guidance and all warnings come too late to rescue them from their inevitable fate. If I had reason to fear that I addressed any such in this congregation, how earnestly should I entreat, how affectionately should I implore you to have compassion, not on those whom you would mislead, not on those whom you would coerce, but on your own undying souls. What account will you render at the great day? how will you appear before your God? how will you answer to your Judge, when you hear His awful voice—"Ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in, ye hindered?" In the instance before us, however, mercy most compassionately sweetened justice; great as was the crime, the punishment was but for "a season," that there might be still room for penitence and pardon: marking most plainly that even of the worst of men there is hope, at least sufficient to authorize our exertions and to aid our prayers.

The effect of this miracle is thus recorded by the evangelist: "And the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

Such was the blessed result of the honest, unprejudiced inquiry of this "prudent man." Had he listened to the dictates of worldly policy, had he attended to the advice of worldly counsellors, he certainly never would have arrived at this merciful conclusion; but determining, through the grace of God, to hear and to inquire for himself, he was brought in

humility, and faith, and obedience, to Him, "whom truly to know is everlasting life."

My brethren, if I address, at the present moment, any of you who have been educated in prejudices against a scriptural view of divine truth, who are surrounded by those who, from whatever motive, are anxious to keep you back from receiving it in all its powerful and influential realities, who would infinitely rather that you should be vain, and trifling, and worldly, if you may but be an accomplished follower in the train of this world's folly, than that you should faithfully and fearlessly take up the cross, and deny yourself, and follow Christ,—to you does the example before us speak most solemnly, and at the same time most encouragingly.

It speaks most solemnly in urging you to seize the present moment, to venture upon no delay, but while the Spirit of God is willing to strive with you, to yield to his entreaties; to search the word of God in humility and sincerity for yourself, and to see, with the Bereans of old, "whether these things be so." Remember, Felix only delayed his search till a more "convenient season," and was lost; Sergius Paulus inquired honestly and faithfully, without the delay of a moment, and was saved. Do not, therefore, deceive yourself by the vain and common subterfuge—it is impossible, under my present circumstances, with my present hinderances, to take any decided thought upon serious religion, to make any important change in my manner of life and conversation. Be assured that this is merely self-deception; there are no circumstances, there are no hinderances, which can fall to the lot of any human being, that can justify such a con-

clusion. Can you be placed in a more difficult situation, in a more responsible office, in a more dangerous rank, than Sergius Paulus, sitting as a Gentile magistrate upon a heathen tribunal, and yet becoming the first Christian convert? And how was this effected? "Not by power, not by might, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." God's grace was sufficient for him. Here, then, his example speaks most encouragingly to you. The same grace is still as freely offered and as abundantly sufficient. Every step you take towards an increased decision of conduct, every effort you make towards greater spirituality of heart and mind, will be less difficult and more gratifying than the last; until at length, when wholly conquered by the love of God in Christ Jesus, and "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," you will be constrained to acknowledge, O blessed Redeemer, "Thy yoke indeed is easy, and Thy burden is light;" Thy "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all Thy paths are peace."

LECTURE VI.

Acts xiii. 39.

BY HIM, ALL THAT BELIEVE ARE JUSTIFIED FROM
ALL THINGS.

THE conversion of Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul, which occupied a prominent station in our last lecture, was an important event at the early period of the church of Christ in which it occurred; and the memory of it was perpetuated in a remarkable manner as regards the subject of our present history.

The evangelist says, "Then Saul, who is also called Paul;" previously to this incident he is never called by any other name than Saul in Holy Writ, and after it, that name is never mentioned, the appellation of Paul having been bestowed upon him, as is supposed by the best commentators, after Sergius Paulus, as a lasting memorial of the conquest which his divine Master had thus achieved by his instrumentality. Surely, if the heroes of pagan antiquity obtained their titles by their sword, and derived them, as it is well known they frequently did, from the names of the countries which they conquered, well might Saul thus receive the name of the first Gentile idolater who had ever been subdued by the sword of the Spirit, the doctrines of the cross. A name so acquired will be recognised, and honoured, and rejoiced in, when every other title of distinction has been long forgotten; while the true and humble

follower of the Lord Jesus Christ will even now confess, I had rather be the honoured instrument of converting one immortal soul to the knowledge of the Redeemer, of plucking one brand from the everlasting burning, than inherit the titles, or acquire the fame, of all the conquerors of the world. Barnabas and Paul having left Cyprus, came, we are told, to Perga in Pamphylia, where the following incident is thus briefly related:—"John departing from them, returned to Jerusalem." This was John Mark, of whom we are told, in the former part of the chapter, that "they had John to their minister." The motive for his sudden departure is not alluded to in Holy Writ, neither is any sentence passed upon it; but in a subsequent passage of the history, we shall find that it was deeply resented by St. Paul, and laid the foundation of a serious difference between him and Barnabas. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God," said our divine Master.

Brethren, before you enter upon a religious course, before you take up the cross and follow Christ, "sit down first and count the cost." Are you content to resign your own will and your own pleasure, to the pleasure and the will of the Most High, and to say, "Other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us, but by Thee only will we" now "make mention of Thy name?" to think nothing hard which God commands, nothing painful which God inflicts, nothing too great a sacrifice which his honour and his glory require at your hands? Are you "able to drink of the cup which your Lord drank of, and to be baptized with the baptism which he was baptized with?"

If you reply, with James and John of old, in the deepest feeling of your own weakness, and yet in all humble reliance upon divine grace, "We are able," then do we rejoice to "bid you God speed;" then say we to you, in the name of the living God, and in union with the living Saviour, and under the protection of the living Spirit, Go forth, "conquering and to conquer." You have, by divine grace, "chosen that good part which shall not be taken away" from you, and on that day when, as we are told in the Revelation, "The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the mighty men, shall hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and shall say, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;" you shall, indeed, rejoice that you have now been counted worthy to suffer shame, and toil, and reproach, for His name's sake.

That John departed from Paul and Barnabas in the midst of their labours, "and went not with them to the work," is afterwards declared by St. Paul himself. But there is a circumstance which we gather from a former chapter, (Acts xii. 12,) which cannot but tend to diminish, at least in some degree, the culpability of this desertion. While Paul and Barnabas, so far as appears from Holy Writ, had no earthly ties to entangle them in running the race set before them, we find that John Mark had a mother living at Jerusalem; an aged, and, as it appears, a pious and a widowed mother; for it was in her house that the disciples were gathered together in prayer for Peter, on that night when the angel of the Lord struck off his

chains, and delivered him from his captivity. It was, then, to return to Jerusalem, where this pious parent dwelt, that John Mark thus abruptly forsook the scene of his labours. That he should have remembered the claims which such a parent had upon him before he embarked in the great cause of evangelizing the heathen, is true; that he who "loves father or mother more than Christ, is not worthy of him," is equally certain; but whatever be the verdict which many may pass upon him, who thus deserted for a season the work in which he was engaged, from the strength of filial affection, and the love of a tender and perhaps declining parent, we cannot speak harshly of an act where such may have been the motive; and surely He will not judge harshly of it, who, amid the agonies of the cross, looked down upon her who had given him birth, and provided for the remaining years of her embittered pilgrimage, a solace and a home.

However valuable, my younger brethren, may be, as unquestionably they are, the more active and ostensible duties of the Christian, be assured that the domestic and relative duties are not less pleasing, not less acceptable in the sight of your heavenly Father; that they must always hold pre-eminently the first place in the ordinary range of Christian requirements; and that while you are watching the sick bed of a suffering parent, or endeavouring to sweeten the declining years of some affectionate relative by your presence, to enliven the closing evening of life's little day by your tender assiduities, and your thoughtful and considerate attentions, you are pleasing God; and serving God, and promoting the honour and glory

of God, in a manner which shall not be forgotten by Him here or hereafter.

Barnabas and Paul, after John had left them, departed from Perga, and came to Antioch in Pisidia, a very different place, and far distant from the Antioch in Syria, so frequently mentioned in the history we are pursuing; while there they entered, on the sabbath day, the Jewish synagogue, and sat down among the worshippers. After the service of the day was concluded, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." Then Paul stood up, and addressed the assembled worshippers at considerable length; first dwelling upon that subject, always so peculiarly grateful to Jewish ears, the abundant mercies of God towards their nation; the manner in which the Almighty had chosen their forefathers, and exalted their seed to an eminent station among the kingdoms of the earth; then the remarkable promises which he had committed to them of the Messiah, which he had so wonderfully and mercifully fulfilled in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, and which they that dwelt at Jerusalem, because they knew him not, had fulfilled in condemning him. This affecting address was concluded by St. Paul with this most blessed declaration: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things."

Upon this discourse of the apostle, the substance of which was probably the substance of all that he delivered, since of the many which he preached during his missionary journey, the Holy Ghost has bequeathed this alone to the church of God, it must be

permitted us to dwell during the remainder of the present lecture; for the truth involved in it is of such unspeakable importance, that it cannot be brought too closely to our hearts.

When, my Christian brethren, we, the ministers of Christ, anxiously desire to know in what manner we should, at the present hour, address ourselves to the hearts and consciences of sinners, we refer to our divine Master, and find his unchangeable command, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name." When we feel some doubts as to the extent of this commission, and the manner in which it should be fulfilled, we look at the manner in which St. Paul understood and obeyed it: "Men and brethren, be it known unto you, that by Him, even by the Lord Jesus Christ, all that believe are justified from all things." We are, therefore, taught both by precept and example, to bring these good tidings in all their blessed simplicity, and in all their abundant consolation, to the ear, and, if the will of God be so, to the heart of our hearers.

At the present hour, then, all which we can call our own, we offer them thus freely, thus unreservedly to you, to all of you, indiscriminately, to each of you, of whatever rank or of whatever age; for at the present day, when so many make a profession of religion, and so few comparatively appear to have ever been humbled, self-abased, broken-hearted under the conviction of sin, this inquiry is a peculiarly important one. Have you ever really felt and acknowledged yourself to be a *sinner* in the sight of God? Do you, upon looking back to the past year, the past week, the past day, see many acts of omission and commission, against which the anger of an offended

and neglected, God is justly pointed? are you deeply penitent for these things? do they press heavily upon your conscience? do you with a contrite and broken heart really bewail them, not merely in the formal acknowledgment of a public confession, but secretly and in private? You have shed many tears for your sufferings, have you ever shed one for your sins? Your troubles and disappointments have cost you many a weary hour, and perhaps many a sleepless night—are your sins and transgressions the only things that are not burdensome? or are you among the blessed number of those whom the Spirit of God has taught to hate sin, all sin, even the least sin, with a holy and inextinguishable hatred? of those to whom He has given that true repentance which can only flow from Him, and which your Saviour was exalted especially to bestow? and do you sometimes think, If I could but feel assured of the pardon of my sins, I could bear my sorrows, my troubles, my anxieties, without repining? Then “to you are the words of this salvation sent;” we say to you, as St. Paul said to his hearers, “Men and brethren, be it known unto you, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things.” If you have come this day to the house of God, not to while away a vacant hour, not to gratify a vain curiosity, but to find pardon for your sins, peace for your conscience, and grace for your soul, you may, blessed be God! obtain it here.

However you may have hitherto been in ignorance, that such a blessing was ever vouchsafed here on earth; and therefore, however little you may have

expected to be in the full possession and enjoyment of it, at this day, this very hour, it may become your own. If you now apply to the cleansing blood of Christ; if you now close with the gracious offers of a Saviour, hearing with the understanding ear, and the heart which God has opened, when we say, "We beseech you be ye reconciled to God;" really believing that the Lord Jesus Christ is both able and willing to cleanse you from your sins, to clothe you in His righteousness, to guide you by His Spirit, and afterwards to receive you into glory; and giving yourself up freely and unreservedly to be governed by Him, as well as to be saved by Him, to be one of His obedient, as well as His believing people, we scruple not to apply to you the words of the text, and to say, that you who thus believe "are justified from all things;" you stand now, from this moment, acquitted before your God; every sin which has hitherto sullied your conscience, and distressed your mind, and grieved the Holy Spirit of God, if, indeed, deeply repented of, and brought to the blood of sprinkling, is pardoned, cast into the depths of the sea, whence it shall never again rise to shame, or to condemn you. O blessed, blessed promise, yet not too good, not too great, to be strictly and undeniably true! For it is no future privilege, no uncertain blessedness, no limited salvation, of which the apostle speaks; "All that believe," he says, "are justified from all things:" not future, or he would have said "*shall* be justified:" not uncertain, or he would have said "*may* be justified;" not limited, or he would have said, "justified from *some* things;" but, blessed be God, present, and certain, and unlimited: "ARE justified from ALL things," are

acquitted, are more than acquitted, are considered holy through the imputed righteousness of Christ, are abundantly pardoned, and received into God's love, and shall be abundantly blessed, and received into God's glory. And this, my brethren, not a privilege confined to the advanced Christian, the experienced believer, but freely offered to the feeblest disciple, the weakest child in the Lord's spiritual family; for it is to such that the beloved apostle spake, when he said, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins ARE FORGIVEN you for His name's sake."

Be not then afraid to believe, what an apostle was not afraid to preach, what the Holy Spirit was not afraid to inspire. Be assured, that it is a doctrine according to godliness, however strange it may sound to the natural man, however doubtful it may appear to the natural heart. It is a doctrine which, until you receive it in the love of it, you will be excluded, because you will exclude yourself, from much of the comfort, much of "the joy and peace in believing." Once learn thus to see God as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus; to see him as accepting your persons, pardoning your sins, loving your souls, and a life of holy and devoted obedience will assuredly follow. For who ever work so hard as those who work for love? Of all the disciples, who is he who alone has left upon record his positive conviction, that the commandments of God are not, cannot be, "grievous?" 1 John v. 3. Could you not discover, even if it were left untold, that it must be he, whom of all the twelve, Jesus loved the most, he who lay upon his breast, and possessed the largest portion of the heart which dwelt within it? "Talk of morality,

thou bleeding Lamb, the true morality is love to Thee," because it is the root, the well-spring, the motive of every Christian virtue, of every acceptable deed of Christian morality and obedience.

There is, however, in conclusion, a parting word in the apostle's sermon to another and a different class of hearers; for having proclaimed the gracious and unrestricted offers of pardon, upon which we have been speaking, he thus concludes, "Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish." Could such an address as this have been necessary? could the apostle have had among his hearers any who were the despisers of so high a privilege, of so unspeakable a blessing?

Yes, my brethren, for we are told in a very few verses after, that these very people who had been present at the discourse upon which we have been commenting, "spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming."

No doubt, as the apostle's eye glanced over that large assembly, while he beheld many who were drinking deeply of the water of life, and receiving it as the very life of their souls, he beheld many also whose evident impatience and indifference, some, perhaps, whose avowed dislike and hostility, were legibly impressed upon their countenances, and to them he boldly and unhesitatingly addressed himself, when he said, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish."

But can such an appeal ever be necessary now? ought such an appeal ever to be made in a professedly Christian congregation?

My brethren, we fear that it is necessary, we be-

lieve that it ought. For that which took place eighteen hundred years ago will assuredly take place to-day: never have the same truths been preached before a general congregation, never shall they be so preached as long as the heart of man is what the sin of Adam made it, without producing similar results. Some will "wonder and believe," and some will "wonder and perish."

Are there none among you, for instance, who while we have been speaking of the freeness of the Christian's pardon, its present certainty and comfort, while, in fact, we have merely enlarged upon the apostle's words, have felt disposed to "contradict the things which were spoken by Paul," and have thought this an unsafe, or an unsound, or an unscriptural doctrine? Are there none of you, who if you have not inwardly denied the truth and the reality of what the apostle has propounded, have, at least for the present, passed it by, and rejected it, as a matter which will do for future consideration, instead of earnestly and anxiously embracing it to-day? If there be, we say to one and to all such, as the apostle said to his hearers, "Beware!" remember that the revealed word of God is not to be trifled with; that to reject is to despise, and that to despise is to perish! There is no medium, there can be none, between a cordial, a heart-renewing, life-influencing reception of divine truth, and a despising, condemning neglect of it. On the great day of account, the generations of men can form but two companies, they who have believed in "the only name given under heaven, whereby we must be saved," and shall enter into rest; and they who have rejected that name, despised those offers, and shall

eternally perish. These, and these alone, are the two innumerable companies, in one or other of which, you, and I, and all, must take our stand: at that awful day, when "the great white throne" shall descend, and heaven and earth shall pass away, one solemn question shall decide our fate, our station, our eternity, Whom did you love and serve on earth? That Being, whether it be God or Satan, will be your master then, he will be your companion, the author of your joy, or the co-partner of your sufferings for ever and for ever. "What shall be the end of them that obey not the Gospel of Christ?" "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

There is no feeling so deeply affecting to the heart of a Christian minister, as the apprehension lest any, to whom he has been the appointed messenger to convey the bread of life, should eventually perish. To think that any who have heard the offers of the Gospel, or sat within the walls of our temples, and joined in our services, should not sit down hereafter in the kingdom of God;—to think that while the children of God shall have entered in with the bridegroom to the wedding, you—yes, if it be but one among you—should be shut out:—you to whom the same Gospel has been preached, the same Saviour freely offered, the same Spirit waiting to be gracious:—you, who have uttered, at least with the lips, the same prayers and praises as the people of God—that after such privileges and such opportunities, you should ever dwell "amidst everlasting burnings;" that you should exchange the hosannas and hallelujahs of angels, for the repinings and curses of condemned spirits! Even the thought is too dreadful to entertain for a moment;

O what must be the tremendous, the indescribable reality? How invaluable, then, is the truth, that "through this man," even Christ Jesus our Lord, is still at this hour "preached to you the remission of sins!" Come to Him now, in penitence and faith, and all will be pardoned, all will be blotted out, all will be forgiven: "Behold, He stands at the door and knocks;" suffer this day, this hour, this warning, to pass unheeded by, and He may have departed from you for ever.

LECTURE VII.

Acts xiii. 43.

CONTINUE IN THE GRACE OF GOD.

AT the close of that most instructive discourse of St. Paul, with which our last lecture concluded, we are told that the Jews withdrew from the synagogue. They had in the first instance offered the apostle permission to address the assembled worshippers; but when they found the heart-searching nature of his discourse, the bold and uncompromising manner in which he advanced the truths of the Gospel; and when they had heard that awful threatening, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!" with which he closed his address, they withdrew discontented and disgusted from the synagogue. The Gentiles, on the contrary, "besought that these words," yes, that these very words, which the Jews despised, "might be preached to them the next sabbath." The marginal reading is, might be preached to them "in the week between," which translation agrees better with the original, and probably alluded to the two weekly services which were usual among the Jews, on Tuesdays and Thursdays,—on which days the law was read and expounded to them in the synagogues, agreeably to an order of Ezra, that they should never be more than three days without the law. In the

present congregation, and after the manner in which this weekly service has now for some years past been uniformly attended, I need not dwell upon the importance of this regulation: at the same time, I shall, I am convinced, need no apology for thus reminding you, that religion is a very tender plant; that it requires, while in its present ungenial climate and unfavourable soil, all the aids which you can gather round it; that if you permit it to remain from sabbath to sabbath, unnurtured by the divine Spirit, it is not the deepest attention to its interests on one day in seven, that will ensure its growth and its prosperity. You must be often, very often tending it: continually approaching a throne of grace to draw from thence the fertilizing influences to which I have alluded; continually seeking the living streams which flow through the word of inspiration, "with joy drawing water out of the wells of salvation." So doing, we would unite our fervent prayers to yours that the seed which is now sowing, even though it should be at present "less than all the seeds in the earth," "should spring and grow up, man knoweth not how, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," bringing forth fruit a hundred fold to the glory of God.

"Now when the congregation was broken up," continues the historian, "many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." Thus indefatigable were these holy men in their Master's service. Their labours were not confined to the temple, or the temple worship; but when those whom they had been the means of converting to the faith of the Saviour whom they preached,

by you. When, for instance, Noah, the first "preacher of righteousness," was employed, day by day, for a hundred years, in acting faith upon a single promise of God, by building the ark that was to carry him and his family in safety upon those waters which were to drown the world, can you conceive any thing so hopeless, so futile as his occupation must have appeared to all around him? Can you imagine any thing more trying than this must have been, in moments of spiritual weakness and temptation, to his own faith? How often must the beguiling thought have occurred to his mind, Can I alone really be right, and all around me wrong? Have I not mistaken the command of my God, or understood it too literally? Is it probable, is it possible, is it consistent with His mercy and love, that the thousands and tens of thousands in the world should be hurrying to perdition, and that I, a poor sinner like the rest, and my little family, should alone be secured? how often must Satan have urged him, by such reasonings as these, to cast aside his tools, to give up his constant and self-denying labours, and to enjoy himself freely and thoughtlessly like the ungodly race around him! So will it often be with you, my brethren; the eye of sense and the eye of faith will see things under very different aspects; your spiritual enemy will often strive to convince you that you are unnecessarily strict, and needlessly precise; that you understand literally what was intended only to be expressed hyperbolically; that many portions of God's commands were addressed to the Gentile world, and were never intended to bind, and control, and regulate the Christian. We urge you, as you value your immortal souls, as you love the

Saviour who died for you, to listen not to my voice, not to the voice of the apostle in the text, but to the voice of our most gracious Redeemer himself; He it was who left it as one of His last injunctions to His apostles, "Continue ye in my love." Think of those by whom this blessed injunction has been disregarded, of those whose religious profession has passed away as the morning cloud and as the early dew, and think of the awful sentence which the Spirit of God has Himself recorded against them: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance."

But while we thus urge you to the performance of this high duty, we would urge you, with equal earnestness, not to attempt to address yourself to its fulfilment in your own strength; blessed be God, He has undertaken for you, and His grace is sufficient for you. With the duty He has most mercifully bound up an accompanying and unfailing promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" you may, therefore, be confident of this very thing, that "He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Continue in watching, continue in praying, continue in striving, and the word of God and the blood of Jesus are pledged to you that you shall "continue in the grace of God," and "that neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The immediate effect of these public and private

exhortations of the apostle during the week, was, that on the next Sabbath-day "almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw it, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken of Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

It was thus that the apostles added the boldness of the lion to the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove. They first freely proposed the blessings of the Gospel to every hearer, and to every heart; "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." When the offer was rejected, they boldly charge the rejection upon the stubbornness and the blindness of those who heard them,—“seeing ye put it from you!” There is no reference to any decree of the Almighty which could exclude them from the proffered blessings; indeed, the very contrary is most obviously implied, or the charge could not be maintained that they had “put it from them;” it was their own prejudice, their own stubbornness, their own sin; as our Lord said unto the Jews, “How often would I have gathered you, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but ye would not.” It is thus also that we, at the present moment, address our hearers; we come as the ministers of reconciliation, we bring you good tidings, we offer to you, to each and to every one among you, salvation through the blood of Jesus; urging you to pray for the grace

of the divine Spirit to "incline your heart" to accept it, to make you a "willing people in the day of His power." If you put it from you, you judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life; that is, you proclaim by that act, that everlasting life is not for you, or you for it, and like the apostles of old, we must carry forward our offers to other hearers and to other hearts.

"For so hath the Lord commanded us," continues St. Paul; while the proud, self-righteous Jews, put from them the words of everlasting life, the poor out-cast Gentiles received it to the saving of their souls. "And the word of the Lord," continues the historian, "was published throughout all the region." Such was the immediate and necessary effect of their belief, that they hastened to convey to the hearts of others those glad tidings which the Lord had carried to their own.

This is invariably the nature of a vital reception of the Gospel of our Lord; it does not lie in the heart like a stone, dead and inoperative, but like a living plant spreads and multiplies, and cannot be restrained from spreading and multiplying; but it is for ever throwing its ramifications farther and wider, and extending its cheering blossoms, and carrying forth its life-giving fruits, wherever there is a human heart to be comforted, or a human being to profit by them.

Is this then, let me ask, my brethren, the effect which the Gospel has had upon yourselves? Do you rejoice to publish it to others? Do you esteem it one of your highest privileges to be permitted to carry its awakening declarations to the careless and the slumbering spirit, its healing remedies to the broken and the contrite heart?

Do not imagine that this is merely applicable to the appointed ministers of God; every individual who has heard the word of God, in the love of it, is bound I do not say to preach it, but to recommend and to impress it upon those around him. Observe how beautifully this is to be inferred from the words of our Lord himself in the Revelation, "The Spirit," the Holy Spirit of God, "and the bride," the church and her appointed ministers, "say, Come;" but is no one else represented as carrying forth the invitation? Yes, my brethren, you, each and all of you, are included; for our Lord thus continues, "And let him that HEARETH, say, Come." You do not fulfil your Lord's injunction, you do not evince your gratitude to Him who has called you, if you, our hearers, are not willing, and anxious, and persevering, in inviting others.

If you reply that you have not the power to go forth among your neighbours, to carry to the poor man's home the blessings of which you are a partaker, we ask, do you employ the power, where you must be conscious that you do possess it, among your own dependents, and in your own house? Is the Gospel ever heard within your walls, and do its words of mercy, through your instrumentality, ever rejoice the hearts of those who dwell with you? Brethren, you cannot really love and know the Saviour, without desiring and attempting to effect this. You cannot say, day after day, "Thy kingdom come," with any real longing for the fulfilment of the petition,—I might almost add, with any real feeling of sincerity,—unless you are striving, as well as praying, for so glorious a consummation.

No sooner did the effects of the zeal of the new converts become manifest by the fruits of which we have been speaking, than the opposition of the enemies of the Gospel was equally apparent, "They stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts."

As certainly as the desire to propagate the truths of the Gospel accompanies their reception, so certainly does the desire to persecute accompany their rejection. And what were the instruments which Satan employed on this occasion for his detestable purpose? The chief men, and the honourable women, nay, more than this, the "devout women." How remarkable is this, and yet how continually do we behold it verified, that the persons most resolutely opposed to the real doctrines of the Gospel are not to be found merely among the worldly, and the thoughtless, and the profane, but among the externally religious and devout! among those who "have a name to live," who attend often the most scrupulously to the form, but are ignorant, fearfully ignorant, of the power of godliness. These are they, who imagining themselves to have attained to precisely the right view, and the right measure of religion, brand all who differ from them as ignorant, or enthusiastic, and would curtail the fair and beautiful proportions of the tree of life, and cast away every blossom, and lop off every branch, until they had reduced it to the poor, dry, stunted stem, which alone they are content to recognise as the living plant.

In the instance before us, so far as the silencing

and banishing the apostles were concerned, the enemies of the truth triumphed: they succeeded in driving them "out of their coasts;" but the imperishable seed was sown, the work was begun; and as well may the proud voice of man be raised against the waters of the ocean, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther," as the power of the oppressor be exerted against the advance of divine truth. Unequal is the warfare, inevitable the event, when the reptile wars against his Maker, when man dares to oppose his God.

The disciples, indeed, departed; but, according to our Lord's express direction, ere they left the city "they shook off the dust of their feet against them." On the last day *that dust will speak*. When the opposer's mouth is for ever silenced; when the gainsayer, who has ridiculed the word, and the ministers, and the people of our Lord, has not another argument, another sarcasm, another scoff to offer, that dust will speak! Yes, the dust shaken from the garment of those who carry forth the invitations of the Saviour, will most undeniably convince their opponents that the messengers of the living God were once among them, that the Gospel of God was brought into their coasts, into their streets, into their houses, but was refused admittance into their hearts. "Even the very dust of your city," are our Lord's own words, "we do wipe off against you; notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city." "For he that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me."

The chapter thus concludes—"And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost." Blessed effect of the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ into the heart! Well did the apostle of whom we are speaking declare, that "the kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

My Christian brethren, you who have "received with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls," do not rest satisfied with any thing short of that heavenly joy which is freely offered to every believing soul. Much injury is done to religion, much discomfort falls to the lot of many of the people of God, because they stop short of that blessed portion of peace and joy which even here their gracious Redeemer is ready to bestow. From the time that you believe, you "are justified from all things," that is, from all that is past; you have the divine Spirit with you for the present, the promise of his continuance for the future; why then are you not raised above yourselves with "the joy of the Holy Ghost;" enlarged towards your God with "joy unspeakable, and full of glory?" What can happen to you to diminish your peace, to disturb your consolation? Even your very worst enemies, your sins themselves, ought, so far from driving you away from God, only to bind you in penitence and humility, the closer to Him; and, as to every thing else, whether it come in the shape of trial, or trouble, or adversity, or affliction, however grievous for the present, it ought to bring, and by the grace of God, it will bring, an increase of happiness and of joy to you whose faith and love "are exercised thereby."

"Rejoice," therefore, "in the Lord, and again I

say, rejoice." Rejoice that He has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; that He has manifested Himself to you as He does not unto the world; that He has taken away your transgressions and cast them into the depths of the sea; rejoice, above all, that "the time is short," that "the fashion of this world passeth away," that "yet a little while, and He who shall come, will come, and will not tarry;" that all things are hastening forward to that blessed and glorious day when your Redeemer shall appear unto your complete salvation, when "the last storm shall blow on the church, when the last dart shall be thrown by the wicked one, and the last enemy be destroyed:"* when you shall be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall you ever be with the Lord:" and may the language of your hearts be, in the words of one of the most holy and devoted of our prelates, "Now, Lord, how willing am I to change time for eternity, the evils of earth for the joys of heaven, misery for happiness, a dying life for immortality. Even so, Lord Jesus, take what Thou hast bought; receive my soul to Thy mercy, and crown it with Thy glory."†

* Bean's Family Prayers.

† Bishop Hall's Works, fol. p. 385.

LECTURE VIII.

Acts xiv. 4.

**BUT THE MULTITUDE OF THE CITY WAS DIVIDED;
AND PART HELD WITH THE JEWS, AND PART WITH
THE APOSTLES.**

WE resume the history of St. Paul at that period, when having been driven from Antioch by the persecution which had arisen there, he, together with his beloved friend Barnabas, had arrived at Iconium. Here, according to their usual custom, they went first into the synagogue of the Jews, offering the blessed privileges of the gospel to that favoured people, and "so spake that a great multitude believed." No higher reward could have been sought by the apostles, no higher reward is desired by the ministers of Christ, than this which was here granted to St. Paul and his companion—"so to speak, that a great multitude may believe." The orator of this world would experience but little satisfaction, unless it could be said that he "so spake that a multitude" applauded; that an admiring audience hung upon his lips, astonished by his eloquence, and attracted by his powers: the minister of Christ, on the contrary, is anxious that instead of the power of eloquence and the charms of oratory, the power of divine truth and the charm of divine love may pervade every sentence which he delivers; that he may himself be overlooked and forgotten in

the wondrous message of mercy and condescension which he brings; all that he asks of you, all that he desires of God, is, that by the power of the Holy Ghost, you may be led to yield yourselves willing captives, not to the strength of his arguments, but to the sweet attractions of his Master's love.

Persecution, as in former instances, soon followed the success of the apostle's word; the "unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected towards the brethren," while the only result it appears to have produced upon the apostles, was, that they abode there the longer, and spake the more boldly in the name of the Lord. The greater the opposition which the Spirit of darkness kindles against the gospel, the greater boldness does the Spirit of light throw into the hearts of its defenders. Never has the church of Christ so flourished as when thus oppressed, and crushed, and persecuted; never has that tender plant raised its head with such powerful and unbroken elasticity, as when trodden beneath the feet of its opponents.

The natural consequence of this was, as the apostle continues, "The multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles." This has ever been, and, doubtless, will ever be, the effect of a faithful, uncompromising display of the word of truth; unless all who hear it are indifferent to its dictates, and deaf to its calls, to newness of heart and life; or unless, by the power of divine grace, all who hear it are convinced and converted, it cannot be otherwise. Until the gospel was introduced into Iconium, doubtless the city was perfectly quiet, and to the mere casual observer, its state

was infinitely preferable before the name of Christ was heard within its walls. But how did that deceitful calm appear to the heart-searching eye of God! He knew it to be not the repose of peace, but the apathy of death. He knew that the very division which worldly men might deplore, and ignorant men might misunderstand, was the natural effect of the sifting nature of the word of truth—dividing, it is true, but dividing only the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, the people of the Most High from the deluded followers of their eternal enemy. This effect of the dissemination of divine truth, so continually apparent during the first ages of the gospel, is by no means infrequent at the present day, wherever it is plainly and faithfully promulgated. Our Lord has truly said, “Suppose ye that I am come to send peace on earth? I tell you, nay; but rather division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother.” If it be asked, Is this a state of things, which as the ministers of peace, we could either recommend or rejoice in? we reply, far from it; happy indeed should we be to know that there was no division throughout the world, to be assured that all who heard the joyful sounds of the gospel should come in as willing and contented captives under the sceptre of the Redeemer. But if we be asked, whether then it be not better to suffer the continuance, even of that hollow peace which the world bestows upon its votaries, than thus to break it up, and for ever, by the power of the di-

vine word, and to carry differences and divisions into neighbourhoods and congregations, and even into the very hearts of apparently the most united families? we reply at once, unhesitatingly, and unequivocally, decidedly not. Better, infinitely better, that there be the widest separation, the most distinct division, that some at least may be rescued from the power of the enemy, and brought in by the divine Spirit as willing captives to our Lord, than that all should continue in the drowsy, death-like apathy to the things of God, and to the future welfare of their souls, which pervades the world. Better, if it must be so, that the father be separated from the son, and the daughter from the mother, than that father and son, mother and daughter, be consigned to the same deadly indifference here below, to the same eternal banishment from our God hereafter. But, my brethren, while we are thus pleading the cause of division, mark well the nature of the division for which we plead. It is not a factious or irreverent difference from all around you; it is not a division for the sake of singularity; it is not a division of ill-temper and unkindness, treating all who differ from you, as if they were unworthy of your regards; but a division like that recommended by the prophet of old, "If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him;" a temporary division here, which will frequently, by the grace of God, prevent an eternal division hereafter. For how often has the example and the testimony of one member of a family, really in earnest in taking up the cross and following Christ through evil report and good report, been the blessed means of bringing a whole family to God; while, on the other hand, a timid, time-serving,

compromising religion, while it dishonours God and injures your own soul, too often deceives those around you into a complacency in their present state of spiritual darkness, and, therefore, into the loss of their future and eternal happiness.

We are aware how liable these observations are to misconstruction and misapprehension; but we shelter ourselves behind the already quoted authority of our divine Master, who, although the "Prince of peace," was well content "not to send peace, but a sword," if it might, while severing men from their nearest relatives and dearest friends, sever them at the same time from their most engrossing pleasures and their dearest lusts: for "better is it," in this sense also, "to enter into life maimed, than having two hands and two eyes to be cast into hell-fire."

The persecution of the apostles increasing, and their present work finished at Iconium, they fled to Lystra, and, says the evangelist, "there they preached the gospel." The storm of persecution, instead of destroying, only widening and extending the blessed effects of the Gospel of peace, as the wildest wind which passes over the face of the country only carries forth the seeds of the field to a happier soil, or a wider and more fertile resting-place.

It was while remaining at Lystra that the following incident occurred, so demonstrative of the power and goodness of God, and of the humility and sincerity of the apostles. "There sat a certain man, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. The same heard Paul speak, who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a

loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked."

"The same heard Paul speak:" this is probably mentioned for the purpose of manifesting the secondary means by which the poor object of the miracle had been made partaker of that faith which the apostle recognised. He had heard St. Paul speak of the salvation of Jesus Christ, and had gladly received the truth into his heart. He therefore believed in that holy name, by the power of which alone St. Paul was enabled to perform the miraculous cure, and so believing by the Holy Ghost, "he had faith to be healed."

Behold, in the case before us, an affecting picture of our own state by nature. "Impotent and a cripple from his mother's womb!" Who is there here present before God this day, who has not, in his own experience, realized the affecting picture? But do I address any of you who, like the lame man of whom we speak, are even now equally helpless, as helpless in spiritual things, as much in darkness and in impotency as when you were born? who, in this sense, never yet have walked; who are unable, even now, to "run the way of God's commandments," and have never yet received, because you have never yet truly sought to receive, that aid from on high, which is equivalent to the command of the apostle, "Stand upright on thy feet."

We then would ask you, Are you one of the spiritually sick, who know your weakness, and desire the aid of the good Physician? Have you "faith to be healed?" Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ "with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength?" Do you believe that He is not only able,

but willing to heal your infirmities, to pardon your sins, to supply you with grace and strength for your future progress? If you reply, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," and if this prayer spring from a sincere and contrite heart, we may say with confidence to you, as St. Peter said to Æneas, "The Lord Jesus maketh thee whole." Yes, from this very hour, from the time that you are thus made willing by the Holy Ghost to close with the offers of your Redeemer, to give yourself unreservedly to be cleansed by Him, taught by Him, ruled by Him, we say, the "power of the Lord is present to heal you;" and, like the cripple of whom we speak, you will be enabled in a spiritual sense, to stand upright on your feet, to obey, to love, and to follow Christ, and to go on your way rejoicing.

No sooner was the astonishing miracle of which we have been speaking, perfected, than we are told, "When the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people." So much more willingly is the world led by the power of Satan, than by the Spirit of God. In spite of all the miracles which the apostles wrought, how few, comparatively, of those who beheld them, believed in the divinity, and sought earnestly for an interest in the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whose power these wonders were effected. Yet is one mi-

racle sufficient, fully sufficient, to induce them to believe at once in the divinity of Paul, and to endeavour to propitiate the favour of the poor, sinful instruments, through whom the Lord condescended to manifest His power. So much more easily is the greatest error in religion received and cherished than the most simple truth; because the same spirit of darkness who bars the human heart against the entrance of all good, is unceasing in his efforts to open it to the reception of all evil.

The conduct of the apostles on this occasion was well worthy of the faith which they professed: "they rent their clothes and ran in among the people, crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God which made heaven and earth;" "and with these sayings scarce restrained they the people that they had not done sacrifice unto them."

It is a happy thing for the ministers of Christ when they seek not the praise of men, but can be contented with the glory which cometh from God only. The love of God is unchangeable, the love of man is more fickle than the winds of heaven. Wo be to us, if we in any degree rely upon it; if we look to it as the end, the object, or the reward of our labours, we shall inevitably reap disappointment and distress, we shall lie down in sorrow. While do you, my brethren, keep your own hearts carefully and unremittingly, and pray that the Spirit of God may keep them from the sin of these idolaters. Be jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy, that Almighty God may be robbed of no part or portion of

the regards which are due to Him alone, by their stopping short in the mere human instruments whom He employs. Remember that your ministers are "men of like passions with yourselves;" flattery will make them vain, praise will make them conceited or self-sufficient; and the moment they become either vain, or conceited, or self-sufficient, be assured that God has done with them, their work is over; and, unless they return to Him in humbleness and brokenness of heart, He will find other and more humble labourers for his vineyard, who shall render to Him the fruit, the whole fruit; for it is all his own, his right hand alone has nurtured it, and the dews of His good Spirit alone have brought it to perfection.

But the fickleness, as well as the emptiness and insufficiency of human applause, is well illustrated by the history before us. The same multitude who could be satisfied with nothing short of paying divine honours to St. Paul, and even worshipping him as a god, in a few short days treated him as the worst of malefactors; persecuted him, as they hoped and believed, even unto the death; "stoned him, and drew him out of the city, supposing him, indeed, to have been dead. Howbeit," continues the evangelist, "as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city." Thus realizing, by his own repeated experience, the truth of the affecting description which he himself has bequeathed to us, "We are troubled on every side, but not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed."

In consequence of this violent attack, the apostles on the following day departed, carrying forth the gos-

pel to other places and other hearers, and revisiting the cities where they had already planted it, "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God."

How essentially necessary was this labour of the apostles, we may in some degree imagine from what is continually passing around us and within us. The word of God soon languishes, if it be not perpetually confirmed and strengthened by the external ordinances of divine grace and the internal work of the Spirit. And yet we should have thought it but a strange method of confirming the souls of the disciples, by foretelling to them the certainty of their trials, and the abundant measure of their tribulations. In acting thus, however, St. Paul acted as his divine Master had done before him. He told the apostles of their approaching sufferings, that when they came to pass, they might remember that he had told them of them; that being forewarned, they might also be forearmed.

It is thus therefore, my beloved brethren, that we would speak to the youngest and weakest Christian among yourselves; it is a portion of our message, a portion which we may not suppress, that your way lies through much tribulation; many difficulties, many sorrows, many temptations await you, or rather await us all. "*We must*," says the evangelist, not *you* must; no, St. Paul, as well as his converts, ministers as well as hearers, all must pass by that way—there is no exception, no reserve. But we must not stop here, this also would only be a portion of our message; the disciples declared the whole, for they said,

“We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” Mark well, therefore, the important conclusion; you shall not only pass into the tribulation, but out of it, through it, safely, happily, certainly through it, and arrive at last at the haven where you would be. The same word which predicts the struggle, blessed be God! predicts the triumph; the same word which makes it certain that tribulations await you upon the journey, makes it equally certain that “an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom and joy of your Lord” awaits you at the journey’s end.

You will understand, then, how such a declaration was well calculated, not to alarm, but to confirm the souls of those who heard it. May God of His mercy grant that it may be blessed to the same most gracious end this day! May the fear of the coming trial be lost in the hope of the approaching bliss! may every succeeding sorrow, and every succeeding tribulation, be only rendering you the more meet for the inheritance which awaits you, until the Lord of your salvation, having carried you in safety through every trial, shall bear you in His arms amidst the swellings of Jordan, above the deepest and the last, when “death shall be swallowed up in victory,” and you shall be made “more than conquerors through Him that loved you!”

LECTURE IX.

Acts xv. 39.

AND THE CONTENTION WAS SO SHARP BETWEEN THEM, THAT THEY DEPARTED ASUNDER THE ONE FROM THE OTHER.

AFTER the labours and persecutions which formed a large portion of the history of St. Paul in the last lecture, we find him reposing for a considerable time among the Christians at Antioch. From this tranquilly happy and useful state he was called by the following circumstance, peculiarly painful as the first dissension which disgraced the infant Church of the Redeemer, and remarkable as the first public exhibition among Christians of that natural tendency of the human heart which has continued to divide the church with greater or less success from that hour to the present.

We read at the commencement of the fifteenth chapter, that "certain men which came down from Jerusalem, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

These men were not Jews, as we might be led to imagine, but Jewish Christians; persons, who, although converted to the religion of Christ, had brought with them their early prejudices in favour of the ceremonial law, and were now anxious to bind it upon the new converts, as necessary to salvation.

There was, no doubt, great plausibility in their arguments, and much weight they would naturally carry with them, from the fact that circumcision was of divine appointment, and could not be neglected with impunity under the old dispensation, and that no direct and positive abrogation of it had ever yet been announced under the new.

St. Paul discovered at once the incalculable danger which would accrue to the souls of the disciples, if this doctrine were tolerated, since whatever was thus put upon an equality with the one great sacrifice of our Lord, whether it were ceremonial or moral observances, would equally militate against the finished work of the Redeemer, and equally render the cross of Christ of none effect. We are told, therefore, that St. Paul "had no small dissension and disputation with them," but unable to bring them to reason, departed with Barnabas for Jerusalem, to lay the whole matter before the apostles.

This was the first general council of the church; and happy would it have been for its peace, if all future councils had been conducted with the same truly Christian feeling and propriety. With the details of it, as forming rather a portion of church history than of the life of him of whom we are speaking, we are not at present concerned; the result, however, is too important to be passed over in silence.

The whole body of the apostles agreed unanimously that St. Paul should carry back to the disciples at Antioch the following decision: That the teachers of such opinions, by uniting ceremonial observances to the blood of Christ, as equally necessary to salvation,

were "subverting the 'souls'" of those who received them; that they, the apostles, had given no such commandment; that there were, indeed, some things from which the Gentile converts should abstain, because they were positive sins, as fornication; and others from which they should abstain for the sake of the prejudices of the Jewish Christians, as "from meats offered to idols and from blood, and from things strangled;" but that for any ceremonial observances to be pressed upon them as necessary to their salvation, was as contrary to the truth, as to the commands which the apostles had always given.

We mentioned at the commencement of this discourse, that the tendency of the human heart, from which this obnoxious heresy took its rise, had never ceased to foment disorder and division in the church of Christ, from that hour to the present. It is true, that obedience to the ceremonial law has long since been given up; but has not a similar and equally dangerous mis-statement respecting the moral law, supplied its place? Have there not always been teachers in the church, who have maintained, that moral duties and moral observances form the whole duty of man? that good works are as much the meritorious cause of salvation, as even the blood of Christ itself? This, then, is the old heresy of these Judaizing teachers, under a new, but not very different aspect, flowing from the same tendency in the human mind, to unite something of its own, whether it be ceremonial or moral, to the perfect sacrifice, and finished work of the Redeemer. Necessary, absolutely necessary, as all good and holy works unquestionably are, as the fruits and evidences of your faith, the

moment we speak of them as the meritorious cause of your acceptance, and that in this sense, as these Judaizing teachers taught of circumcision, without it, "ye cannot be saved," we are "counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing," and according to the apostolical decision, "subverting your souls." While, therefore, you are realizing every work of holiness and piety, and desiring to live in the habitual and consistent practice of them, be watchful over yourselves with godly jealousy, that you do not look to them with any, the slightest, feeling of dependence, or of self-complacency: Christ must be your all in all, your "wisdom," your "righteousness," and your "sanctification," or He will never be your "redemption."

St. Paul having returned to Antioch, with the decision of the apostles, appears to have been successful, through the aid of the Spirit of Peace, in quieting the dissensions which had arisen, and in confirming the souls of the disciples in the true faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. This important point having been established, we read, that "some days after, Paul said unto Bärnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." It was upon this occasion that one of those incidents occurred which even in the lives of the best and holiest of men, too plainly evidence that the old Adam still remains, partially uprooted, partially overcome; but still continually struggling for the pre-eminence, and sometimes, alas! obtaining it.

You will recollect, that in a former lecture, we adverted to the circumstance of John Mark having left

Paul and Barnabas in the midst of their labours, and returned to Jerusalem; it appears that he had now once more joined them at Antioch, and his presence was the cause of that unhappy display of unsubdued temper on the part of the apostles, to which we have alluded. "Barnabas determined," says the evangelist, "to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work." Thus far there was nothing amiss: Barnabas probably took the same view of the case as we suggested in the former lecture, that John Mark had withdrawn only for a time for the purpose of visiting his pious and widowed mother at Jerusalem; but as Mark was "sister's son to Barnabas," it is not improbable that the feelings of relationship might a little influence the apostle, and induce him to look with a more favourable eye upon the desertion of his nephew, than he would have done upon that of a stranger, or than could be expected from St. Paul. But however the cause of their difference upon this occasion might be justified, the manner of it never can, for we are told that "the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder, one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God."

How painful is it, in tracing the history of these men of God, whether it be Abraham, or Jacob, or Peter, or Paul, to find in each and in all, the same remnants of the old and carnal nature raising its hydra heads through all the opposing influences of divine

grace, and proving that endowed as these good men unquestionably were with the largest outpouring of the Spirit of God, they were still the same poor, fallible mortals as ourselves, still carrying about with them a body of sin and death, still having the same need of daily application to the atoning blood of Christ, still the same necessity for the daily renewing of his good Spirit. Let those of you, my brethren, who have made the farthest advance in the Christian life, yes, let every one among us, lay this seriously to heart; the greatest knowledge, the highest spirituality of thoughts and views, will not justify the smallest deviation from Christian conduct or Christian tempers. It was a serious blot in the character of these apostles, it cannot be an unimportant one in our own, if hastiness or sullenness, if unkindness or uncharitableness, be permitted to get the better of us, and to expose not only ourselves, but the religion, which we profess, to the animadversions of the ungodly or the profane. Especially would I address myself to my younger hearers upon the example before us: if you have been led to adopt more serious views of divine truth than those around you, be increasingly watchful over your tempers. Many who dwelt at Antioch, probably, had heard but little of the devotedness and piety of Paul and Barnabas; but be assured that *all* heard of their dissension, their violence, and their separation. So will it be with yourselves; while many, even of your nearest friends, will have little knowledge of the greater enlightening of your mind, the increased spirituality of your devotions, and of your more frequent and more profitable communion with God, all will know if you are

less amiable, less kind, less charitable, in the hourly intercourse of life. Be, therefore, most constant in prayer, that you may never be led by the allowance of any unholy temper to injure the cause which you really desire to serve. Compel those with whom you dwell to say, Although we may think that there is far more attendance to religious duties than can be either necessary or desirable, still we must confess that this increased solicitude about heavenly things has brought with it a remarkable improvement in earthly things; there is so much more of love, and gentleness, and obedience, and consideration for the feelings of others, and neglect of self-gratification, and resignation of self-will, that we cannot but tolerate the error, (as they esteem it,) for the additional domestic virtues by which it is accompanied. How many a husband has thus been "won by the chaste conversation of his wife," as the apostle says, "coupled with fear," the fear of diminishing his happiness, or wounding his feelings! How many a parent who has at first been induced seriously to oppose the increased religious feeling of a child, has been taught by the silent teaching of dutiful, affectionate, consistent conduct, to tolerate, to admire, and finally, by the grace of God, to embrace those blessed principles which have been productive of such invaluable results!

After the separation of Paul and Barnabas, we hear no more of the latter; but it is pleasing to observe that the effects of their dissension do not appear to have been permanent, for there are notices of John Mark of a later date, when we find St. Paul writing thus to Timothy: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the mi-

nistry:" and again to the Colossians, "Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, saluteth you, whom if he come unto you receive him; these only," that is, Mark, and two others, "are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me." It is, therefore, to be hoped that all traces of that unchristian dissension of which we have spoken, passed away, and that these good men laboured together for the extension of His glory here, in whose presence, they are now living and rejoicing together, and shall live and rejoice together when time shall be no longer.

St. Paul, then, having taken Silas with him, departed upon that spirit of superintendence to the churches which he had proposed to Barnabas. While at Lystra he first became acquainted with Timothy, to whom he was afterwards so closely and so dearly attached. His father being a Greek, although his mother was a Jewess, he had never been circumcised; and now we find St. Paul, in direct opposition to the letter of the decree which he had himself advocated, commanding the rite of circumcision to be observed. When circumcision was enforced as necessary to salvation, St. Paul, at the risk of offending the whole body of the Jewish converts, would not for a moment tolerate it. But when circumcision, no longer looked upon in this unscriptural light, might be a means of reconciling the Jews to this new convert, the son of a Gentile father, St. Paul so far yielded even to their very prejudices, as not only to sanction but to command it. How difficult a point, how greatly needing the enlightening power of God's grace to determine, when to conform to the prejudices of those around us, and when to oppose them,

resisting, if it be needful, even "unto blood." Pray for the guidance of God's good Spirit, my brethren, with a determination to follow it in all godly simplicity and sincerity, and you will seldom be left in doubt upon any point affecting the welfare of your souls, or the glory of your God; you will never be left to mistake the dictates of a carnal, time-serving policy, for the inspirations of the Holy Ghost.

At Troas St. Paul was joined by Luke, who accompanied him during his future travellings, and, as the author of the "Acts of the Apostles," recorded them for the benefit of the church of God in the history upon which we are commenting.

Having been directed by the Almighty in a vision, St. Paul passed at once into Macedonia, and took up his abode at Philippi. While there, an incident occurred of considerable interest, and replete with instruction to us all:—may the Spirit of God convey its important lessons to our hearts.

The inhabitants of Philippi were chiefly, if not entirely, Roman; there appears not even to have been a Jewish synagogue; and, with regard to Christian converts, there does not seem to have been one in the colony. Upon inquiry, however, St. Paul discovered that there was a little company of women who had become "proselytes of the gate," as it was termed, or believers in the God of Israel, although without adopting all the ceremonial peculiarities of Israel. He learnt yet further, that these poor women were in the habit of assembling for prayer on a river's side, at some little distance from the city, probably to avoid the noise and tumult of the idolaters on a day devoted to the service of God.

It appears that the whole company assembled for this hallowed purpose were women.

Thus, even from the earliest ages of the church of Christ, has the weaker sex put to shame the stronger. In the days of Christ himself, as has often been remarked, they were the last who left his cross, they were the first who sought his tomb. In the times of the greatest spiritual deadness, when an almost universal worldliness has overspread the church of Christ, religion, true, vital religion, has been found still lingering in the female bosom; and in the times of the greatest spiritual revivals, it has always been observed that women have been foremost in the holy cause. If we ask at the present moment, who evince the greatest zeal in every good and holy work, to whom are we indebted, instrumentally, for the first breathings of devotion in the hearts of the young, who chiefly instruct the children of the poor, visit the parents in sickness, carry, not merely temporal aid, but, far more valuable, the comforts and consolations of Jesus to many a sick chamber, and many a dying pillow—we cannot but reply—Christian women. Yes, with all their infirmities, and they are not few; with all their sins, and they are not small; with all their follies, and they are neither few nor small; they are not usually ashamed of the God they worship, the Saviour they adore; they honour His name, they love His service, they fill His churches, and evince by their devotedness to the cause of His truth, that if the worldliness, and ambition, and coldness, and indifference of our sex, would long since have driven back the Spirit of Peace to the abodes of peace from which He came, Christian women, by their prayers, and zeal, and

love, have been the blessed instruments in the hands of God of detaining among us the Spiritual Messenger. The reason is obvious; the religion of Jesus Christ has its residence in the heart,—“With the heart,” we are told, “man believeth unto righteousness,” and “if our bodies,” then, especially our hearts, “are the temples of the Holy Ghost.” It is, therefore, no matter of surprise that they whose hearts are formed by God our Creator, the most tender, the most ardent, the most affectionate, should be made, the most frequently, by God our Redeemer and Sanctifier, the depositories of this blessed gift.

Do I mention this to court the approbation, or inflate the vanity, of you, my female hearers? God forbid! yea, rather to prove, and to humble you, and to show you what is in your hearts. Has the Almighty in mercy bestowed upon you feelings and affections and qualities of mind which he has in many instances denied to men; then what return are you making for these decided superiorities? You possess a greater degree of tenderness than men—we acknowledge it; does it then evince itself, not by the excesses of a foolish sensibility, but by inducing such a tenderness of conscience, that you shrink from the approach of the smallest sin, and dread the pollution of an unhallowed thought.

You possess more ardent minds than men—we acknowledge it: does your zeal exhaust itself in the frivolities of a passing, perishing world, utterly unworthy of you? or, like Elijah of old, are you “very zealous for the Lord God of hosts?”

You possess stronger and sweeter affections than men: how do you bestow them: by over-loving some

poor, sinful, earthly object, whom your glowing imagination has arrayed in every fancied and fabulous superiority, but who is, after all, a fragile reed, which will inevitably fail you if you lean upon it? or by loving the Lord your God, as revealed to you in Christ Jesus, with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.

You possess more powerful influence over those you love: how do you employ it? by leading them still deeper into the paths of worldliness and folly? or by wisely, judiciously, and prayerfully endeavouring to win them to Christ?

Be assured, your affections, your zeal, your influence, while they rank thus highly among the endowments which you now possess, will rank equally highly among the talents for which, on the last great day, you will be called to reckon. Glorious, for the sake of your Redeemer, will be the sentence of those among you who are devoting yourselves, your souls, your bodies to the service of the Lord: tremendous the condemnation of those wicked servants, who have prostituted their Lord's gifts to the service of His eternal enemy, and of those unprofitable servants who have buried their Lord's talent in the earth, instead of returning His own "with usury." Matt. xxv. 27.

St. Paul having discovered, with the persevering zeal of his divine Master, the little company of women of whom we have spoken, and found them at their accustomed place of sabbath resort, and engaged in their sabbath occupation, sat down with them by the river-side, and talked to them of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. They had before known the true God, as revealed to them in the Jewish Scriptures,

St. Paul now taught them to know Him as far more clearly manifested to them in the Son of his love. How improbable was such a circumstance in such a place! The inhabitants of a heathen city, withdrawing from its abominations to seek the God of truth in this secluded spot, and finding there a preacher of the Gospel, and better far, the Saviour whom he preached: so truly did our Lord promise, "Unto you who hear shall more be given;" so, undoubtedly, may it be affirmed, that wherever God has a people, there will He send the bread of life; that wherever Christ has a flock, there will He send a shepherd to tend it.

"And a certain woman," continues the evangelist, "named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." How blessed an effect of a single discourse when the Spirit of God accompanies it? How many discourses have you heard, my brethren, upon the same all-important theme, and yet, perhaps, have never yet sought the Spirit of God, to open your hearts, and to teach you profitably and savingly to attend to them. Lydia "*attended* unto the things spoken:" the word, in the original, means something more than a mere external attention, a mere listening; it signifies, to apply the mind, to be deeply engaged in what is said. By this, then, you, may in some degree determine whether God has opened your heart; do you not only hear, whenever an opportunity is offered, but do you seriously attend, so attend to things spoken, as to endeavour to apply the great truths set before you to your own soul?

Are you deeply interested in these things? Have you a growing delight in them? Do you find your knowledge and your love of spiritual truth increase; your hatred of sin, your love of the Saviour, your resignation of your own will, your devotedness to the will of God, grow and strengthen while you hear? And do you act honestly and faithfully according to your convictions, renouncing such things as the word of God forbids, and cultivating such affections of heart and practising such duties, as it commands. These are proofs of hearing and attending to the word preached; proofs without which your bodily presence in this house of prayer will be found, at the last day, to have profited you nothing.

But we must conclude this instructive story;— Lydia was converted, truly converted to the faith of Jesus Christ, and received “the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace,” for she was baptized with her household:—her children—for she rightly believed that the promises are to us and to our seed, and that in bringing them to baptism, she was as far as in her lay, bringing them to Christ; her servants—for it would appear that it pleased God to bless the preaching of the apostles in due time to the conversion of her whole house.

The fruits of her own conversion were immediately apparent in her life and conversation, for she thus addressed St. Paul and his companions: “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us.” It was thus that as soon as her heart was opened to receive Christ, her house was opened to receive His people—as soon as her affections were united to the

Saviour, they were united to the saints; demonstrating that hers was "a faith which worketh by love," and which made her willing, for the sake of her divine Master, to entertain the poorest and the most despised among his servants, and this at the obvious hazard of contempt and obloquy, and even of persecution and death itself. My brethren, if yours be the faith of Lydia, it will be as lively, as operative, as influential; it will rejoice in every good and holy work, "especially towards them which are of the household of faith;" it will induce you to seek the society and friendship of those on earth with whom you hope to dwell throughout eternity; you will love the poorest and meanest of the people of Christ, in proportion to the clearness with which His image is impressed upon them; you will delight in alleviating their sorrows, in supplying their necessities, in administering to their comforts; thus, according to our Lord's most remarkable injunction, "making to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" turning the devil's weapons against himself, by employing the wealth with which he would overwhelm and suffocate your spiritual life, into an instrument to advance the glory of God, the happiness of His people, and the measure of your own temporal and eternal felicity.

LECTURE X.

Acts xvi. 25.

AND AT MIDNIGHT PAUL AND SILAS PRAYED, AND SANG PRAISES UNTO GOD; AND THE PRISONERS HEARD THEM.

AFTER the conversion of Lydia, which formed the subject of our last lecture, we find St. Paul remaining still at Philippi, no longer in obscurity, but brought, by the incident upon which we are about to comment, into great and painful notoriety.

For the purpose of spreading still more widely in Philippi the good seed, of which he had made a commencement "at the river's side," St. Paul appears to have gone thither every day to speak upon the same blessed and profitable truths. Perhaps the little company of devout women who worshipped there had added to their numbers, and were daily bringing more and more from among their relatives and friends, to listen to the life-giving words which fell from the lips of the apostle.

However this may have been, one thing is certain, that our spiritual enemy began to envy his success, and determined, so far as in him lay, to obstruct and to ruin it. The method by which he attempted to carry into effect his guilty-design was a very remarkable one; it was not, as he had done in the case of our Lord and the apostles, by ridiculing and degrading the teachers, and by controverting and

bringing into contempt the doctrines; far from it: his present plan of attack was infinitely less obvious, but in proportion more dangerous and destructive. You shall hear it in the evangelist's own words: "As we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation; and this she did many days."

"The servants of the most high God" were acknowledged and flattered by "the enemy of all righteousness,"—one of the most fatal methods by which Satan still opposes the progress of the word of truth in the world and in the heart. My younger brethren, learn to question the sincerity, or the sense of all who flatter you, especially upon your religious attainments: remember that your Lord has for ever decided the amount of praise to which you are entitled; for He has said, "When you have done all, you are *unprofitable* servants; you have done that which was your duty to do;" and who will venture to affirm that he has even done all, or attempted to do all, which the word of God, and the Spirit of God, and his own enlightened conscience, have commanded him to do? Observe again, that it was while going to prayer that Satan urged his repeated attacks against St. Paul. Never does your spiritual enemy rage more fiercely than when you are going to prayer. By every artifice which he can invent he will strive to keep you from it. Is it to private prayer you are going? he will endeavour to persuade you that you

have not time at present, or that you are not in a right frame of mind, or that you are not enjoying the presence of God, and that another season will be more auspicious. Is it to public prayer? you will endanger your health; the weather is too damp, or too cold, or the church is too hot, or some friend calls upon you at the moment, and renders it impossible. Yes, impossible to those who fear man, rather than God. The method, however, which Satan adopted against the apostles was, as we have seen, by sounding their praise publicly in the streets of the city; crying after them continually, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation."

How painful to the apostles must such a testimony have been, when borne to them by such a being! Every day as they went to their oratory, to meet the Lord's little flock, and to preach unto them Jesus, did this poor, possessed woman follow them through the streets of the city, and by the power of the devil, which she was unable to resist, offer this true, but from such a source, most distressing and dangerous testimony. For whatever might be the effect upon the minds of the apostles, the effect upon the mind of the passer-by would naturally be, if Satan bear such favourable testimony to these men, surely they are in league with Satan: the Saviour whom they preach must be an impostor, and His Gospel a device; all that they teach, all that they do, must be taught and done "through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils." Such a conclusion was inevitable, and such a conclusion was, no doubt, intended

by our spiritual adversary to have been the effect of the incident we have narrated.

Day after day, for "many days," did the apostles suffer in patience and in silence, until at length "Paul being grieved" for the state of her who spake, and, doubtless, still more grieved for the discredit which would thus be attached to his Master's name, and his Master's service, invoked the power of that Master to free him from these opponents. You will observe, it says expressly, "Paul was grieved," not enraged; he spake far more in sorrow than in anger. This also we would desire, should be the feeling of our own heart in rebuking sin. We would grieve for those among you who, like the damsel before us, applaud the teacher, but neglect the lesson: we would grieve for those who believe that the ministers of religion are really "the servants of the most high God," and yet remain indifferent to the message which they bring; we would grieve for those among you to whom sabbath after sabbath, is "shown the way of salvation," and yet who have never yet sought earnestly the aid of the Spirit of God to bring you to Him, "who is the way, the truth, and the life." Paul, then, "being grieved," turned and said to the spirit, "I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her; and he came out the same hour."

But the devil was not to be thus easily foiled; if he cannot win us by his flatteries and his favours, he will, if possible, crush us by his opposition. "When her masters," those wicked men who made a merchandise of the calamity of this poor creature, by selling her juggling prophecies to the best customer, "saw that" since the devil was cast out, "the hope

of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and carried them before the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city."

Behold another instance of that accusation, which from the days of Christ himself to the present hour, has been put, by our spiritual enemy, into the mouth of the opponents of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: the apostles troubled the city! Yes, they did trouble it, but it was, as the angel troubled the pool of Bethesda, that he who entered in, might be healed. Blessed is that city, or that family, or that heart, which is so troubled: godly trouble is the first forerunner of that "peace of God which passeth all understanding."

This, however, was not the view which we could expect to be taken by heathen magistrates, and a heathen people; we are accordingly told, that "the multitude rose up against them, and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them; and when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely; who having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks;" a remarkable instance of unnecessary cruelty on the part of the jailor, and of the harshness of his disposition; for it is obvious that with the bolts and bars, and chains of a prison, he might have kept his prisoners in perfect security, without subjecting them to the still closer confinement of the inner prison, or the still greater inconvenience of the stocks.

Let us for a moment contemplate the apostle in this helpless and pitiable situation. He refers to it

twice himself in his succeeding epistles, when he tells the Corinthians, "Thrice was I beaten with rods," "in stripes above measure," that is, more than were allowed by law; and, again, when he says to the Thessalonians, "We were shamefully intreated, as ye know, at Philippi." Good reason had he to speak of it thus. For performing a miracle of mercy and compassion, he was treated worse than the law would have treated the lowest and most degraded malefactor. He was torn from his beloved assemblage of Christian friends, his garments rent from off his shoulders, his back lacerated with scourges, his feet crushed in the stocks, and he himself lying in the lowest dungeon to await, what he had every reason to expect would be, the far more terrible sentence of the succeeding morning. Truly, if we had seen him thus, we should have been tempted to exclaim, O Satan, thou hast conquered!

But, my brethren, judge nothing before the time; there are days in the life of every individual, there are moments in the experience of us all, when, if we were to give sentence upon the passing hour, we should arrive at a similar result; when our spiritual enemy has so far succeeded in his machinations, that, reasoning according to carnal nature, we should be compelled to exclaim, All is over; I am trodden into the dust beneath the feet of my eternal enemy, and I shall rise no more:—at such moments, instead of crying with the desponding patriarch, "All these things are against me," endeavour to realize something of the blessed confidence of the psalmist; say, with the eye of faith steadily fixed upon the Saviour, "Why

art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance."

Let us, then, follow St. Paul to the innermost prison; examine, if possible, into his state of mind, and see whether we shall find him sinking beneath the accumulation of adverse circumstances to which we have alluded. The time, the evangelist declares, was midnight; the place, the lowest dungeon; the persons of whom he speaks, Paul and Silas, who had a few hours before been most severely and cruelly punished. And what was their occupation? Bemoaning their unhappy fate? Bewailing their misery, from which there appeared to be no escape? Repining at the apparent desertion of Him whose name they bore? Nothing of all this. They betook themselves, in humble and cheerful confidence, to God. "At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them." So little were they cast down by their present situation, that they could sing the praises of God; so little were they ashamed of their occupation, that although they were in the innermost prison, their prayers for deliverance, and their hymns of praise, resounded throughout the whole of that dreary abode, and were heard by all its wretched inmates. They praised God: what could they find to praise Him for at such an hour, and under such trying circumstances? Doubtless they praised Him that "they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name's sake." In what situation can you ever be placed, my brethren, with such an example as this before you, in which you can consider prayer as hopeless, or praise as inappropriate? How

does it condemn many among ourselves, who, placed in the midst of prosperity and happiness, hardly know what it is from the heart to praise God ! O, be more in praise as well as prayer; for a thankless Christian is one of the most disgraceful characters upon which the all-seeing eye of God can ever fall.

But let us look at the effect of the apostle's prayers. "Suddenly,"—yes, before the last accents of those praises had died upon the ear, before the last sentence of their petitions had fallen from their lips, the cry for deliverance was heard and answered,—“Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.” How triumphant a moment for the apostles, how invaluable a testimony to the other prisoners, of the power and mercy of Him with whose praises the vaults of that prison-house had so lately rung ! Of its effect upon the prisoners nothing is recorded ; we may hope that not only “the doors were opened,” but that many hearts also, like Lydia's, were “opened to attend to the things spoken of Paul;” that not only their “bands were loosed,” but that the fetters, which had so long bound them to the service of Satan, were broken, and that their feet were set at liberty to run the way of God's commandments.

The Spirit of God, however, has not left us in total ignorance of the effect of that supernatural interposition; there probably were many, there certainly was one, who will have cause to bless God through all eternity for the events of that fearful night. The morose and savage jailor, he who neither feared God nor regarded man, he it was, who, awaking out of his

sleep at the rocking of the earthquake, and finding the prison doors open, and an awful stillness reigning throughout, imagined that the prisoners had fled, and that, doubtless, he should have to expiate his apparent carelessness by an ignominious death ; in the first paroxysm of despair, therefore, he “ drew out his sword, and would have killed himself. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out.” How changed, how softened, how subdued ! The lion becomes a lamb ; the jailor bows before his prisoners, leads them forth out of the lowest dungeon into his own house, and finally addresses them in terms of the most profound respect, as well as of the deepest anxiety, saying, “ Sirs, what must I do to be saved ? ” Tell me of that God to whom your prayers and praises were addressed, and who has wrought for you this wonderful deliverance ; tell me of that Being whose name you bear—how can I propitiate His anger, secure His favour, deliver my soul ? O, how deeply must our spiritual enemy, when too late, have bewailed his folly in carrying his opposition to so extreme a length ! While the disciples were for many days at large in Philippi, we hear but of one woman who was entirely converted to the Lord ; but a single night in prison and in fetters has brought, not only a hardened sinner, but, as we shall hereafter see, a whole family to God ! What a testimony to Satan’s folly and weakness, and to the wisdom and strength of Him in whom we trust. How often afterwards exemplified, when “ the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church ! ”

But we must hasten to observe the brevity, the simplicity, and yet the abounding fulness of St. Paul's reply: behold the Gospel condensed, if we may so say, into a single verse. They answered the inquiring sinner, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

How blessed and soul-satisfying a reply! All that the most despairing sinner could need; all that the most weary and heavy-laden sinner could require; all that the most ignorant sinner could ask, is contained in these few but comprehensive words: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Let me, then, inquire of you, my brethren, have they ever yet been carried by the Spirit of God to your hearts? If not, be assured that no cruel and degraded jailor, no persecuting Saul, no hardened and crucified thief, ever needed them more than yourselves. No: however offensive this truth may be to many, no one ever needed them more certainly than the most virtuous, most amiable, most lovely among you.

They reveal the one, the only way to the Father, the way which every prophet, and martyr, and saint, who ever lived, must, if he be now in glory, have sought, and found, and travelled, while on earth: for there is none other,—there is not one way for the saint, and another for the sinner; one for the moralist, and another for the reprobate; there is "no royal road" to heaven: the sceptred monarch and the fettered malefactor have equal need of the atoning blood, the justifying righteousness, the sanctifying Spirit, of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not, therefore, inquire,

How have you lived, or how are you living? How moral, how virtuous, how charitable have you been? but we inquire, and we would, as in the sight of God who seeth the heart, solemnly demand it of every man, every woman, every child, now before us, Have you ever asked, with a deeply contrite, humbled heart, this great, this all-important question, "What must I do to be saved?" If you would enter into the kingdom of God, you must ask it, and not merely as Pilate asked, "What is truth?" without caring one iota for the reply, without even waiting to hear it; but you must ask it seriously, earnestly, prayerfully, as if heaven or hell depended upon the answer. For such, most assuredly, is the fact: they do depend upon it. We scruple not to say, that your fate for weal or wo throughout eternity, depends upon it; for as you hear, as you receive, as you improve the answer, so will the countless ages of that eternity be passed.

That answer, then, can only be given in the words of St. Paul, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Believe that He lived, and died, and rose again, to reconcile you to your God. Away with all human merits, cast far from you all human dependence, and come with a simple and entire reliance upon the finished work of the salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out: receive Him in the whole of His mediatorial character into a penitent and renewed heart: cast the whole of your burden of sins, of sorrows, and of troubles, upon Him, and confide in Him with an obeying faith for all you want, and all you can ever want, for time and for eternity.

This is the belief to which St. Paul alluded; this is the belief of which he declared, "Believe, and thou shalt be saved." A belief which must, indeed, be the sole work of God's good Spirit, but which will never be withheld, if that Spirit be earnestly, faithfully, perseveringly sought for.

St. Paul having declared this great and saving faith to the jailor, did not suffer it to fall lifeless upon his ear, but dwelt upon it, as he loved to do, in all its abundant and overflowing richness; he "spake unto him the word of the Lord," says the evangelist; and we can well imagine how much is implied, we can conjecture how the remainder of that night was spent; how he told of all that Jesus did, and said, and taught, and suffered, and purchased. Surely our hearts would have burned within us, had we been in that blessed company. What a new world must have been opened up to the mind of that heathen jailor; what sorrow for the past, what joys for the present, what hopes for the future! A coming state, of the existence of which he had never heard; joys unutterable, and full of glory, at God's right hand, of which he had never conceived; and all freely offered, freely made over even to him, the darkest and the guiltiest! O, what a blessed hour was that which brought St. Paul into his custody; what blessed tidings were those which brought the Redeemer into his heart! And, my brethren, will not the present hour be as blessed an hour to you, if the same merciful tidings find their way by the Spirit of God to *your* hearts? If any among you have never yet really beheld the beautiful simplicity of the Gospel, but have been striving and toiling according to some hard and com-

plicated system of human ingenuity to reconcile yourselves to God, now to find that all is easy, all is simple, all is within the comprehension of the most ignorant, the reach of the most helpless, the hopes of the most guilty; all as freely offered to you, as to him of whom we have been speaking. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." My beloved brethren, "turn not away from Him who speaketh from heaven." Receive as freely, as it is freely offered; pray earnestly for such a disposition of heart, as shall enable you now, this day, this moment, to close with the offers of your adorable Redeemer, to become one with Him and He with you for ever and for ever. So doing, every sin is blotted out, every transgression forgiven; grace, and holiness, and happiness, and heaven, are your own; for he that hath the Son, hath life," spiritual and eternal. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," is the declaration of that Son himself, who has added, "He that receiveth my testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." May you set your seal to this all-important truth this day, and may you be among that blessed, and holy, and happy number, whom the Spirit of God has sealed unto the day of redemption.

LECTURE XI.

Acts xvii. part of the 6th verse.

THESE THAT HAVE TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE
DOWN ARE COME HITHER ALSO.

WE concluded the last lecture with the account of the wonderful conversion of the jailor at Philippi; but the time did not admit of our remarking upon the effects of that conversion, which were as obvious as those in the case of Lydia. For we are told in the 33d verse, that the jailor took the disciples "the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and when he had brought them into the house, he set meat before them." Such were the immediate effects of a true and saving faith; having begun to love an unseen Saviour, he began also to love His suffering followers; for "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The whole heart and conduct, therefore, of the jailor were changed. He who the evening before had "thrust the disciples into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks," now himself washes the wounds of these very prisoners; anoints the deep and painful lacerations which they had received from the "many stripes" that had been inflicted by the magistrates; and affords these poor sufferers the refreshment of food, of which they stood so greatly in need.

How invariably does the same conduct flow from the same principle! When the jailor anxiously inquired, "What shall I do to be saved?" we do not find St. Paul answering, Supply the wants of your suffering fellow-creatures, be pitiful, be courteous. No; he makes, what many in the present day would term a most dangerous and injudicious reply; he confines himself simply to the one great leading doctrine of the gospel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Not one word of duties, not one word of Christian charity and love, as either in whole or in part the ground of salvation. Here, as the objector of this world would say, here is a solidian indeed; a man who preaches faith without works, who says, "Believe," and all will be well—how dangerous, how delusive a doctrine! Such is the manner in which men have reasoned, and men do reason, and men will continue to reason, so long as there is one unenlightened mind, one unconverted heart. It is in vain to reply, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Once let this be effectually laid by the Spirit of God in the renewed heart of the believer, and every Christian grace and moral duty will assuredly form the beauteous superstructure. It is in vain, I say, that we reason thus; the objector and the caviller, the wilfully ignorant, and the maliciously ignorant, repeat the same charge, and exult in the same accusation, that the doctrines of the Gospel are licentious doctrines, and that they who preach the faith of the gospel, give full permission to those who hold it to live as they please. Our answer, the only satisfactory answer to all such, is, Look at the experience of eigh-

teen centuries. Wherever we find the apostles desired to state the ground of salvation, they state it to consist in a true and living faith, or rather in that one great sacrifice, which a true and living faith appropriates and brings home to the sinner's heart; they do this in the most intelligible and simple language, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and wherever in Holy Writ we find an individual who is made willing, by the grace of God, to receive this direction in the love of it, there we as invariably find the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, kindness, charity, springing into existence in his life and conversation, and one or other of these fruits usually recorded in the word of God for our instruction. What is thus authenticated in the scripture of truth, is, as I have just said, corroborated by eighteen centuries of living example; is demonstrated at the present day; that the good tree will produce the good fruits; that the faith of Christ Jesus in the heart will bring forth holiness and obedience and love in the life. For may we not with propriety inquire, Who are they who are the chief supporters of every charity? who are they who are foremost in every good and holy work? who are they from whom even the world itself, with an absurdity and contradiction pre-eminently its own, always expects the greatest strictness, the most rigid uprightness, the most abounding charity, but the very persons whom it accuses of holding the licentious and inoperative doctrine of justification by faith only? Is not the world daily and hourly guilty of this incongruity, my brethren? Would it tolerate in the life of these men one thousandth part of the immorality,

which it not only tolerates but applauds in the lives of its own followers? And what does this prove, but the very fact which we are endeavouring to establish, that so invariably does the faith of the Gospel produce the fruits of the Gospel, "our enemies themselves being our judges," that almost in spite of themselves, and in obvious opposition to their own repeated assertions, they do expect to find, and, blessed be God, they usually do find, consistent holiness, integrity, and charity, in the lives of those who with the jailor at Philippi, have been taught that they shall be saved simply and entirely, instrumentally, by "believing on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Continuing the narrative, we are told, "When it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let these men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul. The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore, depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out."

When you are compelled, and there are cases in which the meekest and most merciful may be compelled, to proceed against an adversary, content yourself with the smallest portion of retributive justice which will place your cause upon such a footing as the honour of the Gospel and your own character require; having obtained this, be content, remembering who has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Were this direction followed, how much of the bitterness and heart-burning, which now divide

even Christian friends and Christian families, would be averted, and how much more of heaven would even here be enjoyed by those who are preparing for it hereafter!

St. Paul, in this instance, affords us a remarkable example of the union of the two Christian duties, firmness and forbearance: he compels the magistrates to humble themselves, and to reverse their unjust sentence, by going in person to the prison and fetching him out; but he does not, as he might have done, institute a rigorous prosecution against them, and subject them to heavy penalties for an obvious infraction of the well-known Roman law, which enacted that no Roman citizen should, without trial, be either "beaten or bound."

We read, in continuation, that, "the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates, and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out."

After a short sojourn at the house of Lydia, probably to make her acquainted with the conversion of the jailor, and thus to lay the foundation of that church of the Philippians, which, during nine succeeding centuries was a spiritual and flourishing branch of the church of Christ, St. Paul departed, and, as the evangelist informs us, "came to Thessalonica." He had only preached the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ there for three weeks, when such was his success, that we are told "some believed and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few." How remarkable is it, in tracing the footsteps of St. Paul, to observe the widely-differing effects of divine grace.

In one city he remains for many days, and we hear only of two families converted; in another he preaches but for three sabbaths, and we are told that a great multitude believe; and yet, in both cases, there were the same truths and the same preachers.

And do we not behold similar effects, and equally remarkable, even at the present time? While in one congregation, "the word preached does not profit," as the apostle says, "not being mixed with faith in them that hear it:" in another, many ears are open to hear, and many hearts to receive, and multitudes, to use the prophet's simile, "fly as doves to their windows," to the sound of the Gospel, and better still, to the Lord of the Gospel. O, let us pray that this may be abundantly realized among ourselves, that there may be "added to the church daily, numbers of such as shall be saved," until the whole of the little flock of Christ among us shall be gathered out of a perishing world, and be added to that vast multitude, which no man can number, of all people, and nations, and kindred, and tongues, who worship before the throne and before the Lamb for ever and ever.

No sooner had the effects of St. Paul's preaching become visible in the numerous conversions of which we have spoken, than, as in all preceding cases, persecution followed. So invariably was this the case, that it imparts a feeling of repetition to the narrative which we could almost desire to avoid. And yet if the Spirit of God has seen fit in His infinite wisdom, to record these facts, would it be our wisdom to omit or pass them by? No: doubtless there is a distinct and separate lesson to be learnt from every repetition of this kind which we meet with in Holy

Writ, and our prayers must be, from each fresh incident, to be permitted to gather the instruction it was intended to impart. Sometimes the motives, sometimes the actions, and sometimes the persons of the persecutors, are dwelt upon; the last of these in the present instance is made the most prominent, for we are told the Jews which believed not took unto them "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set the whole city in an uproar."

This was the class of men who, in the earliest ages of Christianity, waged the most unceasing warfare against the truths and the followers of the gospel; and wherever an opposition is excited, this is the class of men who even now swell the ranks of our opponents. Look at the private history of the infidels who were the most distinguished for their opposition to Christianity during the last century: look at the infidel poets and demagogues in the present day, and do you not find that, with one or two exceptions, they deserved the appellation of the apostle, "lewd fellows of the baser sort?" men, however high their station in society, as much distinguished for the laxity of their morals and the irregularities of their private conduct, as for the bitterness of their animosity to the revealed word of our God exhibited in their published opinions. Thus does the Almighty sometimes overrule the hatred of Satan, by obliging him to make use of such instruments as shall, to the mind of every unprejudiced inquirer into divine truth, convey an antidote with the poison; for what reflecting man can be for a moment misled by the arguments of those opponents to the truth of God's word, who have so obvious a motive, as an unholy life supplies, for desiring

to find the tremendous revelations of the Gospel, its day of righteous judgment, and its eternity of wo to the unrepentant sinner, a "cunningly devised fable?" I would impress this argument upon the minds of my younger hearers more especially, because there is, I am convinced, much weight in it; so much that we almost invariably find an infidel opposition to the *doctrines* of the gospel bear a very distinct proportion to the departure in the life of the opponent from the humbling and self-denying *precepts* of the Gospel.

But let us pass from the character of the enemies of St. Paul at Thessalonica, to the nature of their charge: "These men that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also." Yes, my brethren, this was the accusation, and, wonderful to relate, it was, although not in the sense their accusers intended, perfectly just and perfectly true. Thanks be to God, the apostles did "turn the world upside down," when the preaching of a few poor fishermen, directed by the omnipotence of God's good Spirit, overthrew the splendid theology of Greece and Rome, emptied their temples, and planted the cross of a crucified Saviour upon the ruins; destroyed the most profound speculations of their deepest philosophers, and at length brought the emperor of the world to confess, that in the sign of the cross of Jesus Christ he alone could be victorious. And so far are we, their unworthy successors, at the present day, from shrinking from a similar accusation, that it is our glory and our boast; we desire to wage a war of extermination against the sinful principles and practices of that world, of which our Lord has said, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world;" we would most ear-

nestly desire to see the love of the world, and the fear of the world, and the ways of the world, so completely eradicated from the hearts of our hearers, that our enemies might again declare with truth, "These men have turned the world upside down," have emptied the assemblies of the worldly, the haunts of the profligate, the dens of the drunkard, the theatres of the ungodly, as their predecessors did the temples of the devil; until the love of God in Christ Jesus, and the delights of his service, and the blessedness of a close and intimate companionship with Him, shall, in the heart of every true believer, take the place of that system of idolatry and alienation from God, which is sealing up the world for the day of its final and irrevocable judgments.

My Christian brethren, has any such effect as this been produced within you? Has the world been overthrown in the temple of your heart? or is it still dominant, still paramount? Is that great and engrossing idol taken down from its pedestal only for this little hour, to be carefully replaced as soon as you leave this house, or, at the farthest, before another sun shall dawn upon you? This is not sufficient: this is not the effect which the preaching of the Gospel is intended to produce; the cross of a crucified Saviour cannot stand upon that pedestal to-day, on which the idol of the world is to be re-elected to-morrow; it refuses to stand side by side with it; it must be there alone, or it will not be there at all; your idol, like the Dagon of the Philistines, must be thrown down, broken to pieces, trampled under foot, or the work of the Spirit is not wrought within you, God is not honoured, Christ is not glorified, you are

not serving Him now, for "you cannot serve God and mammon," you will not serve Him in eternity. Be warned, then, you who are temporizing in this matter, living, or vainly hoping to live, for both worlds, see the folly, the fruitlessness of the attempt. Pray that the world may be "turned upside down" within your heart, that it may never be re-established, never resume its dominion, but lie there a broken and discarded idol, till even its very fragments shall be dissolved amidst the brightness of your Redeemer's coming.

The apostles having been preserved from the effects of the opposition of which we have spoken, we next find St. Paul under very different circumstances, and in a very different place, even in the polite, the learned, the refined city of Athens; surrounded by philosophers falsely so called, and invited by Epicureans and stoics to preach to them the gospel of Christ. There are few situations in which, throughout his whole history, St. Paul is ever presented to us, that required so much of the wisdom which is from above, as that in which we find him here. He was not now called to converse with the simple-hearted Lydia, or the ignorant jailor, but to address the learned and the acute—the infidel, who scoffed alike at all religions, and the wise in their own conceits, who particularly despised "the doctrine of Jesus and the resurrection."

On this occasion, then, if on any, we might have expected a display of the most astonishing eloquence, and the most deep and recondite reasoning; for here were persons who could thoroughly appreciate it, and to whom, if ever needed, or if ever applicable, it

would be peculiarly and remarkably so. But no: St. Paul has recorded his own opinion upon this matter, when he said, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God; for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." We find, therefore, that while he addressed himself to the task with all needful ability and prudence, his discourse was just as simple, just as unadorned, just as entirely pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation, as it was upon the river's side at Lystra, or in the jailor's room at Philippi.

Although it would be going beyond the limit of these lectures to comment upon his discourse, it will not be uninteresting to advert to the subject of it.

It appears, then, that as St. Paul passed through the streets at Athens, and observed their temples and their altars, he found one of the latter with this remarkable inscription. "To the unknown God." He, therefore, at once adopted these words for his text; and having by these means attracted the attention of that inquisitive people, and awakened their curiosity, he proceeded to demonstrate to them, that the Being to whom they had in ignorance dedicated this altar, was in fact the triune Jehovah, the God of the Christian, "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

My brethren, are you disposed to think, that although this might be a very appropriate subject for a Gentile auditory, it would be a most ill-timed and ill-chosen topic upon which to address ourselves to professing Christians? Then suffer me to make another inquiry: Think you that in a Christian country no altars are ever erected, no knees are bent, no prayers are offered, to an "unknown God?"

In looking abroad on the world, we behold some who are respectable and upright, conscientious in the discharge of all their relative duties, high-minded and honourable, men of talent, men of wisdom, men of excellent character and conduct; upon every other subject admirably well read, and well informed. But ask these men what they know of God? and, alas! how lamentable is the deficiency! If their altars were rightly inscribed, we fear the Athenian inscription must be their own, "To the unknown God." For with all their superior advantages of time, and talents, and wisdom, and learning, the humblest mechanic, the poorest peasant, with the Bible in his hand, and the Spirit of God within his heart, sees more and knows more of God than some of our wisest statesmen and most profound philosophers. Do you inquire, whence is this? we reply, Because this wayfaring man has been "taught of God;" because he has been led by God's good Spirit into that path in which it is declared, that the "wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein;" because he has been brought to "see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," the only manner in which, while in this world of sin and infirmity, it will ever be discernible.

Examine yourselves carefully, then, my beloved

brethren, whether you know the great Jehovah thus, as a God who is to be seen, and known, and approached, only through the Son of his love; a God who, thus sought, condescends to manifest Himself to the weakest and the most ignorant, who "is not ashamed to be called their God," because He has opened to them a new and living way by the blood of Jesus, through which He is guiding their footsteps into the paths of peace; a God who has prepared for them a city; "has blotted out as a cloud their transgressions, and as a thick cloud their sins," and has made them accepted in the beloved. If you, through divine grace, so know Him, He is no longer to you an "unknown God;" "flesh and blood have not revealed" this knowledge unto you, "but your Father which is in heaven." You know that which the worldly-learned, however refined and intelligent, have never known; you have been now made partakers of a knowledge which has been denied to kings and prophets, to the wise and prudent, and yet freely dispensed to the poor, the ignorant, and the babe—a knowledge of which all that you now know, valuable and important as it is, is but little, compared with what yet remains to be known, even here, of the unsearchable riches of Christ; and as nothing, and less than nothing, compared with that which you shall know hereafter.

"Though something of Christ be unfolded in one age," says an old divine, "and something in another, yet eternity itself cannot fully unfold Him." "I see something," said Luther, "which blessed Austin saw not; and those that come after me, will see that which I see not." "It is in the studying of Christ, as in

the planting of a newly discovered country; at first men sit down by the sea-side upon the skirts and borders of the land, and there they dwell; but by degrees they search farther and farther into the heart of the country: Ah! the best of us are yet but upon the borders of this vast continent." May God of His infinite mercy grant, that you and I, my beloved brethren, may be steadily advancing, obtaining more knowledge, more grace, more love, until there be nothing to be learned but that which perfect vision and perfect fruition alone can teach us!

LECTURE XII.

Acts xix. 2, 3.

HE SAID UNTO THEM, HAVE YE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST SINCE YE BELIEVED? AND THEY SAID UNTO HIM, WE HAVE NOT SO MUCH AS HEARD WHETHER THERE BE ANY HOLY GHOST; AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, UNTO WHAT THEN WERE YE BAPTIZED?

THE last lecture concluded with a brief review of St. Paul's sermon at Athens, of the effect of which we are informed at the conclusion of the 17th chapter, where it is said, "Howbeit, certain men clave unto him, and believed." How strong is that expression, "clave unto him:" there is no room for change, or fickleness, or vacillation; they believed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and gave themselves up to him with full purpose of heart, to be ruled by him, and saved by him; to "follow the Lord fully;" that the same winds of persecution which blew others away from him, should only drive them the closer to the Saviour, to whom, in the beautiful language of an uneducated peasant, they clave "as the limpet to the rock." "Among the which," continues the evangelist, "was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." It was this Dionysius of whom the earliest Christian historians relate, that being at Heliopolis in Egypt, at the time of our Lord's crucifixion, when he beheld the mid-day darkness

which attended that awful event; he exclaimed, "Either the God of nature suffers, or the frame of the world will be dissolved." His thoughts had, therefore, in all probability, been early led to inquire into the truth of the mission of that Being in whose sufferings all nature had so miraculously sympathized; and we are not surprised to find that he was the first-fruits of the apostle's preaching in Athens. Dionysius, the Areopagite, was a person of importance, being one of the judges of that court in which St. Paul had spoken; and Damaris also is generally supposed to have been of high rank in the society in which she lived. "Not many mighty, not many noble are called," says the revealed word of God; "for the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen," "that no flesh should glory in his presence." Yet are not the great ones of the world excluded, unless they exclude themselves; and it is probably to convince us of this fact, to encourage the rich, and the mighty, and the noble, that the Spirit of God has recorded the names of most of those persons, who, in high situations of worldly importance, believed in those early times on the Lord Jesus. Thus the Spirit of God has seen right to mention, that "Joseph of Arimathea" was "a rich man;" that Paul had friends, to whom he desired to be remembered, even in "Cesar's household;" and that Dionysius was "the Areopagite." How often, while there is time, would I urge you whom it has pleased the providence of God to number among the wealthy and the noble of the land, to remember the peculiar snares, and the peculiar difficulties of your particular situation; "the camel," and "the needle's eye,"

should never be banished from your memory and your hearts; the narrow way and the strait gate, strait and narrow as they are to all, are infinitely straiter and narrower to you than to any around you; all circumstances combine to impede your progress, to entangle your footsteps, to keep you from the cross of your Redeemer, and from the gates of heaven; the fascinations of the world, the snares of its riches, the glitter of its pomps, all spread their thousand snares across your path; you are flattered, and courted, and applauded, not because you are wiser or better than those around you, but simply because you are more noble or more wealthy. I know none so much to be pitied as yourselves; for with all these additional impediments, no additional allowance will be made for you at the bar of God; you will stand there as the poorest object now before me will stand, and you will be sentenced precisely upon the same conditions, tried by the same laws, subjected to the same ordeal, as the veriest outcast of them all;—pardoned, if clad in the righteousness of your Redeemer;—condemned, if you shall have lived and died in sin, having rejected Him—the “way, the truth, and the life,” who is now so freely offered you, and whom none have ever sought in vain.

We are informed of nothing farther of St. Paul’s ministry at Athens. Some, indeed, declared that they would “hear him again of this matter;” but the Spirit of God is not to be thus trifled with: if men *will* not hear at those seasons when the voice of the preacher beseeches them, and when God is waiting to be gracious, they *shall* not hear at those future and more “convenient seasons” to which they profess to

look, but which God has never promised, and with which, when so rejected, He will in all probability never furnish them.

From Athens St. Paul proceeded to Corinth; and having, according to his usual practice, and to our Lord's express command, first offered the Gospel to the Jewish residents there, and without avail, he withdrew himself from the synagogue, and preached in an adjoining house, where his ministry was blessed to the conversion of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and to many of the Gentiles. It was at this time, when St. Paul having retired to rest, probably overwhelmed with the labours of the day, and feeling his utter insufficiency, in his own strength, to meet those of the morrow, that the Lord Jesus Christ, He whom he had once persecuted, but now worshipped and adored, stood before him, and thus addressed His fainting servant: "Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city." How merciful an encouragement at such a time, and in such a place: "Be not afraid, but speak." Perhaps you might have thought, that if to any among the sons of men such advice were needless, it was so to St. Paul, the most fearless, the most undaunted of the followers of our Lord. But it is needless to none. The ministers of God, from the apostles themselves down to their most humble and imperfect follower at the present day, are all men of like passions with yourselves, and are continually tempted to suppress the truth, to modify their message, to temporize with those who hear them, lest they should offend and provoke, where

they are anxious to conciliate and instruct. Remember, then, that when your ministers are speaking painful truths, they suffer quite as much from the necessity of doing so, as their hearers; that if they were to follow their own inclinations, they would unquestionably prefer "prophesying smooth things;" but that they are bound by an obligation from which there is no escape, as St. Paul said: "*necessity* is laid upon me; yea, wo is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel." Whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, they must declare the whole counsel of God.

You see, then, that their duty and their authority are the same as the apostles; do you ask what is their encouragement? blessed be God, their encouragement is the same also, "I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee:" with this promise imprinted upon their hearts, they may defy the power of their enemies; there may be much bitterness and much hostility, many may "set upon them," but they shall not avail to hurt them; neither men nor devils shall injure him who has God for his guide, and the Holy Spirit for his teacher, and the Lord for his companion. But remember also, my brethren, that this promise was not confined to ministers; "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world," is made to every true believer. Realize it, then, in your own hearts, and whatever be your trials, your labours, or your sorrows, they will be but as the light affliction of a passing moment. If we are able to say of every trial, it is light, even when divided with an earthly friend, how much lighter will the heaviest burden become when divided with Him who is all power, all strength,

all love. Do I say divided with Him? Ah! there is our frailty and our weakness, the imperfection of our faith, the infirmity of our trust; we cannot confide the whole of any thing which oppresses us, entirely and unreservedly to the Lord, we are not content unless we divide the burden with Him; this was never intended; his most gracious direction speaks of no such division; it says, "Cast *all* your care upon Him, for He careth for you;" retain nothing of its wearying anxiety, nothing of its galling burden, but say with the prayer of faith, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me;" help will be laid upon One that is mighty, and you will enjoy infinitely more of the blessed consciousness of that peace and trust which the Lord vouchsafes to His people.

Greatly, then, must St. Paul have felt the encouragement of this delightful promise, while his ministerial efforts must have been not a little strengthened by the declaration of his divine Master, "I have much people in this city." Much people in the heathen city? Yes; many, doubtless, were at that time "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity," who were included in the number of which the Saviour spake; for of all the cities in the world, Corinth was one of the most profligate and abandoned. Profane writers tell us, that in the temple of Venus alone there were a thousand women living in the open commission of sin, not as a deed of darkness of which the perpetrators were ashamed, but as a portion of the religious rites of their accursed idolatry; yet in "that city," in the polluted Corinth itself, the Lord had "much people." How wonderful is the thought!—"much people" doubtless at that moment sunk in

all the grossness and iniquity which surrounded them, who had never yet heard the name of Jesus, and yet for whom the Lord had lived, and agonized, and died; and who were shortly to be effectually called, and perfectly justified, and everlastingly glorified! What encouragement to St. Paul to go forth among them as the minister of reconciliation; what encouragement for every Christian minister as regards the people among whom he labours! When we behold those who are living in utter disregard of the Gospel invitation, those to whom all that is spoken from the word of God appears at present matter of careless unconcern, our hearts would faint within us were it not for the comfortable persuasion which these words convey. Had the Lord much people in the profligate Corinth, and shall he not have much people in the thousand-fold more profligate London? Surely we may hope, and the very hope itself gladdens our hearts, and cheers our spirits, and rewards our toils—we may hope that in this great city, amidst all the guilt and sin and impurity which pervade it—amidst the mass of human beings from which Satan is daily reaping so large and fearful a harvest, the Lord Jesus Christ shall not be left without a gathering. O no! surely we may cherish the hope, that where so many assemble to hear the word of God, there the Lord has “much people,” and that He will gradually, but certainly draw many among you, my brethren, forth out of the world of the ungodly, that you shall not only hear, but receive, the tidings of salvation, and be united in heart and soul, for time and for eternity, to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

For a year and six months did St. Paul minister at

Corinth—a longer season than he ever remained voluntarily at any place, with the exception of Ephesus, during his whole history. And, doubtless, if we may judge from his epistles to the Corinthians, the fruit which he gathered in for his divine Master from that abandoned city, was most abundant and most prolific.

After enduring the usual trials and persecutions there, which were, however, much modified by the good sense and judgment of the Roman deputy Gallio, we find St. Paul, at the commencement of the 19th chapter, returning to Ephesus.

While there, he became acquainted with certain “disciples,” and seeing that they knew but little of the salvation of Jesus Christ, “He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” Surely this was a remarkable case; “disciples,” and therefore, professed believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who had yet received no “unction from the Holy One,” and did not even know whether there were any Holy Ghost. Could such a thing have occurred at that early period, when the miraculous gifts of this good Spirit were so widely prevalent in the church? Then, my brethren, may not such a thing occur now? Is it impossible that I should at this moment be speaking to “disciples,” professed believers, who know but little of the renewing, sanctifying, sealing power of that divine Spirit? May I not, therefore, inquire of you, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost?” How many are there in a professedly Christian community, who, if they answered candidly and truly, would be constrained to confess, “We do not,” experimentally,

"know whether there be any Holy Ghost." Let me, then, urge you to inquire of your own hearts, whether any now present are amongst the number. Have you ever been a partaker of the renewing influences of that divine Spirit, by which alone you are enabled to "put off the old man which is corrupt, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness?" "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ," the word of God has declared that "he is none of His." You may have the name of Christ, but if it be unaccompanied by His Spirit, it will only be as that church of old, of whom our Lord Himself said that "they had a name to live, but were dead." You cannot, indeed, say, as these disciples said, that you "have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost," for your truly scriptural church, in all her ordinances, most abundantly provides against the possibility of such a charge; but have you been led, by what you have heard, to seek that Holy Ghost, to rely upon his teaching, to follow His directions, to depend upon His guidance, and, above all, are you bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit? Better, far better, never to have heard of His existence or His name, than, after you have heard of it, to grieve that merciful Being, to quench His influences, to resist His strivings, to turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven, and to follow your own counsels and your own imaginations.

"And Paul said unto these disciples, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people

that they should believe on Him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." It was, be it remembered, to disciples that St. Paul addressed himself, and might he not with equal reason at the present day, were he once more to go forth as a preacher of righteousness, again make the same inquiry among ourselves? Might he not still say, "Unto what were ye baptized?" Would he behold none living according to the course of this world, entering into all its "pomps and vanities," its follies and its allurements, knowing but little of Him whose name they bear, enjoying but little of private communion with Him, seeking but little of His guidance, and but seldom referring their actions to Him, or making His honour and glory their object and their end? Would it be unjust, then, to ask such persons, "Unto what were ye baptized?" Were ye baptized unto the baptism of the triune Jehovah? or unto what has well been denominated "the trinity of Gentiles," "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life?" If they reply, We were baptized to the self-denying creed of a self-denying Saviour, then might it not be fairly asked, With the solemn vows of your baptismal service upon your soul, confirmed by your own free and public ratification of them, registered in the courts of the Almighty, can you say, dare you say, that you are engaged heart and soul in the performance of them? My brethren, I would at this hour venture to ask these very questions of yourselves. I would say—I speak to you as baptized persons—you are under a bond from which you cannot extricate yourselves; you have promised, under the most

solemn obligations by which man can bind himself, to dedicate yourselves to God. If you are going on in the indulgence of any hidden lust, or dishonesty, or sin; if you are living to the world; if you are putting God off with a mere lip-service, a mere bodily attendance at his house and ordinances, while your hearts are far from Him, you have broken, and you are breaking, vows which eternity cannot dissolve, you have deserted a service into which you voluntarily entered—you have apostatized from God! This may be strong language, but there is no medium; either you are Christ's, or you are not; either you are loving and obeying Him now, and daily meetening for His blessed presence, or you are disregarding and rejecting Him, and, in the service of another master, are meetening for another, and O, how different, an eternity!

We judge no man, we "speak as to wise men, judge ye what we say;"—we leave the inquiry to your own consciences and to God; you cannot disregard your baptismal covenant without being fully aware of it; you cannot be aware of it, and neglect it, without incurring the deep and deadly taint of sin upon your soul. Knowing this, we should be your enemies, your worst of enemies, if we did not warn, and caution, and threaten, by the "terrors of the Lord," and beseech you, by the "mercies of God, to present yourselves a living sacrifice to Him."

We do not, indeed, call upon you, as St. Paul called upon the persons of whom we have spoken, to be re-baptized; your baptism is good, you are already "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus;" all we desire to urge you to, is this—to fulfil your baptismal

engagements: the grace which you then received has, perhaps, been lost; pray, therefore, for that new heart and right spirit, without which you cannot see the kingdom of God. The promises they made for you, and since ratified by yourselves, have, in too many cases, been broken and forgotten; pray for the aid of that Holy Ghost of whom we speak, to enable you to "turn to the Lord, for He will have mercy upon you, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." But do not deceive yourselves; do not imagine, if you are living to sin, to the world, and not to God, that your baptismal covenant will profit you any thing; the very fact that it is a covenant, is sufficient to undeceive you: for what becomes of a covenant, when one of the covenanting parties fails of his engagement? Is it not null and void? Could you, among men, hope to derive any advantage from the term of a *broken* covenant? And "shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Surely you do not doubt it;—then cease to rely upon a covenant, without endeavouring to fulfil it; renew your vows of allegiance with God, through the blood of a crucified Redeemer; enter afresh into His service, devote yourself unreservedly to Him; say, "Father, I have sinned in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son," but now accept me for the sake of Him who came to "seek and to save them that were lost." I am lost, and unless the Saviour seek and find me, I shall irretrievably perish; "draw me, and I will run after Thee;" make me Thine own child by the Spirit of adoption, receive me into Thy blessed family, and keep me from the world, the flesh, and the devil—above all, keep me from myself, that I

may serve Thee with "a perfect heart and with a willing mind."

Especially would I apply these remarks to you, my younger brethren, who, during the present week, are about to dedicate yourselves formally to God in the "service of confirmation." Go with these feelings deeply inwrought upon your heart, and that service will be to you more than the mere rite and ceremony which it is to thousands; it will be to you the entrance to a course of holiness and happiness, which will never end; it will be to you a seal to your admission into that "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure," by which you shall be made one with a reconciled God, a loving Saviour, a comforting Spirit, for ever and for ever.

LECTURE XIII.

Acts xix. 20.

SO MIGHTILY GREW THE WORD OF GOD, AND
PREVAILED.

IN recommencing these lectures,* I could wish to remind my hearers that they are intended to be very plain and simple and practical commentaries upon the divine word. Nothing critical, nothing learned, nothing argumentative, will be admitted into them. They will be, as far as I am enabled to render them, faithful expositions, and practical applications of the leading events in the life of him of whom they speak, and will derive their chief interest and value, if they have any, from the fact, that many of these events, will, perhaps, touch responsive chords in our own lives and conversations, and vibrate, it may be, mournfully, but, I trust, usefully, to our affections and hearts.

Upon the last recurrence of this holy season, you were invited to the consideration of the life and doctrines of St. Paul. After having traced this great apostle of the Gentiles through many scenes of labour and of peril, we left him at Ephesus, where, as we are informed in the chapter from which the text is taken, he abode two years, preaching "the word of the Lord Jesus," and "working special miracles."

It was thus that it pleased God to confirm the teaching of these holy men of old, that if their

* The 24 lectures comprised in this edition were published originally in two volumes, and at different periods.

hearers believed not them, they might believe the works; while in the present instance an express prediction of our Lord was remarkably verified, namely, "Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to the Father." We are, accordingly, told in the 12th verse of the chapter from which the text is taken, that from the body of St. Paul "were brought unto the sick, handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirit went out of them." The object of bestowing upon the children of men such extraordinary power was, no doubt, to convince the enemy and the blasphemer, that the truths which were preached to them were an immediate message from God himself: We, therefore, find few instances in scripture of miracles, unless for the purpose of establishing some new doctrine, or confirming the authority of some messenger of the Most High. I need scarcely say that one among the many proofs that the so-called miracles *of the present day* are not, as they profess to be, extraordinary interpositions of divine power, may be deduced from the truth to which I have just alluded; they are neither wrought to establish any new revelation from the Almighty, nor to accredit the mission of any new messenger from above: there is, therefore, no analogy between them and the miracles of the Bible; and this being the case, it will, I trust, argue neither want of candour, nor of charity, to say that we must wait for much stronger evidence than any which has yet been adduced, before we can acknowledge them to be divine interpositions; and must, after the most careful and solemn investigation which we have been able to bestow, attribute the instances of which so much has

been lately written and spoken, rather to the powerful effects of religious excitement upon warm and ardent temperaments, than to any deviation from those laws which nature has received from nature's God.

The effect upon the inhabitants of Ephesus of the very remarkable instance of divine interposition of which we have been speaking, is thus described: "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, who did so; and the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man, in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house, naked and wounded."

Thus in this, as in most other cases, the true and genuine coin was followed by the worthless and contemptible counterfeit. "The vagabond Jews," willing to make a merchandise of that which the apostles freely bestowed, presumed to use "the name of Christ," without participating, or desiring to participate in his Spirit; hoping, from what they had seen, that that name of power could not be used without producing effects which might readily be diverted to their own temporal interests.

It is not too much to say, that the preaching of Christ in these our days has been followed by results by no means dissimilar. There are still those, we fear, who venture to imitate these exorcists of old, and to preach an unfelt and an unappreciated Gospel; to

“call over” their hearers “the name of Christ,” while their own hearts have never been truly convinced by His Spirit, or subject to His power. Like “the seven sons of Sceva,” who were almost destroyed by the man they professed to heal, these false teachers will, in the end, receive the due reward of their deeds, in the contempt of those whom they deceive, and still more fatally in the wrath of Him with whose great name they have presumed to trifle. For has not our Lord himself declared, that in the last great day, when all mankind shall be ranged in two vast companies, preparing for a blessed or a miserable eternity, there shall be those who shall say, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? then shall He answer and say unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.” Nor is it only in the case of ministers that dangers such as these exist. You, my brethren, are not yourselves beyond their influence. You may, in a day of much religious profession, like the present, learn to name the name of Christ, to follow in the train of His people, to attend religious meetings, to take prominent parts in religious societies, and yet be at last void of all interest in Christ, and all share in His blessedness, as the seven sons of Sceva! The heart, and the heart alone, is the index to the Christian. “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Pray that “the pearl of great price,” may be your treasure; that you may not content yourself with the name of Christ, but with your whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, seek His love, which is better than life, His approving smile, which

will one day be better to you than ten thousand worlds. Live to him here, that you may live with Him throughout a glorious eternity.

In the instance before us, the effect of our blessed Lord vindicating, as we have seen, his insulted authority, was very remarkably evinced; for the evangelist adds, "This was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus, and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."

What a triumph was this for the infant Gospel! How did it thus, even in its cradle, strangle some of the most noxious serpents of heathen superstition! These magicians, it appears, were men of high repute in their generation; they had attracted the homage of the multitude by their juggling devices, and had expended immense sums upon the books which contained the rudiments of their art; and yet, no sooner did the grace of God really influence them, the power and the love of Christ take full possession of them, than they resolved to sacrifice every thing for which they had hitherto lived, to part with fame, property, character, each of them most dear to the natural mind; and to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus," their Lord.

It will be profitable to observe for a moment the process which took place in the minds of these persons, and brought them to so remarkable a result. We are told that they first "believed," they then "con-

fessed and showed their deeds," and they lastly, "brought their books together, and burned them before all men."

The religion of our adorable Redeemer is the same, brethren, in all ages: as there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," so there is invariably produced, by the true acknowledgment of this one Lord, the heartfelt reception of this one faith, the participation of this one baptism of the Holy Ghost, the same blessed effect. That effect is precisely such as the evangelist has here recorded. When you are led to a true and living faith in the Son of God, or, in other words, when you *believe*, you are induced to confess before God, with penitential sorrow, your deeds; you learn to look back upon much of your past life with deep heartfelt regret, deploring from your inmost soul many of those things, which, in your days of darkness, cost you neither repugnance nor sorrow. But even this confession, sincere and heartfelt though it be, the genuine fruit of a living faith, as it would not satisfy your God, so neither does it content your own awakened heart. Like these magicians, you cannot rest till you have not merely confessed and deplored, but *put away* from you the accursed thing, till you have relinquished every unholy profit, and given up every unlawful or questionable enjoyment.

This may fairly be assumed, then, as a test by which to determine the strength with which the Gospel of Christ has been brought to bear upon yourselves. Has it ever influenced you thus? Has it operated thus powerfully to the pulling down of the strong holds of sin, even though the sacrifice be costly and self-denying. Has every thing displeasing to

God been relinquished—every thing contrary to His will and His commands been given up? Or, if this be saying too much, have you at least good reason to hope that there is no profit, and no pleasure, and no pursuit, which you are not anxious to sacrifice to the will and the honour of your God? Happy are they whose religion abounds in such unquestionable fruits as these: they proclaim at once the tree of the Lord's planting, whose leaf shall not wither, whose root is imbedded deep in the Rock of ages, and whose head has risen above the mists and damps of this world of sin, and is bearing much fruit in the perpetual sunshine which lies beyond them.

The reflection of the apostle upon recording the self-denying act of the magicians of which we have spoken, is the following: "So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed." Yes! there is no proof so striking, there is no evidence so satisfactory of the mighty power and progress of God's word, in a city, in a congregation, in a human heart, as when it leads to unshrinking obedience to the plain and positive commands of God. If these magicians had been only half convinced, and half converted, they would have been content to have sold their books, or to have laid them by in some secret chamber, with perhaps a lingering feeling that at some future time they might recur to them without danger; but this will not content the true convert, he cannot rest satisfied until he has placed himself, as far as in him lies, beyond the temptation or the possibility of a retreat. My brethren, if the word of God be growing mightily and prevailing among you, similar instances will not merely occasionally occur, but abound. The man of

pleasure will forego the sinful or unprofitable amusements in which he once delighted: the man of business, if he have been a dishonest man, will now confess his deeds to God, and, as far as he is enabled, make reparation to those whom he had defrauded; he will put away his false weights and his short measures; or, if he have hitherto been upright and conscientious, but still too much engrossed by these earthly duties, he will now tear himself from all undue regard for them, put them from henceforth in their proper place, and "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness:" the man of literary pursuits will, I do not say burn his books, but he will watch carefully over the effects which his favourite studies produce upon his affections, his temper, and his mind: and if he finds, as I fear he sometimes will, that these things, innocent in themselves, are by their engrossing and fascinating power, injurious to the best interests of his soul, he will at once unhesitatingly and decidedly renounce them. When I say, "at once," I do not mean at the very outset of a religious course. No! this is too much to expect; but as soon as the word of God "*prevails*," as the apostle expresses it;—as soon as the sword of the Spirit has beaten down the thousand barricades which an indefatigable devil is ever throwing up around the citadel of our corrupt hearts, to defend them against the approach of their rightful owner. I allude thus particularly to this last class of my hearers, because, in commencing a religious life, they have often very peculiar difficulties to cope with. They are not in danger from the temptations which delude, and the sins which ruin, the profligate or the sensualist; their

temptation is of a more refined, a less obvious, and therefore often of a far more dangerous nature. Amidst the cold and heart-petrifying studies of philosophy or science, the simple truths of the Gospel too often become distasteful; amidst the fictitious sorrows of imaginary beings, the excitements of romance, or the charms of poetry, the joys and sorrows of religion lose their due value and preponderance.

Thus, even after the Spirit of God has really begun a good work in the heart, there are often many dangerous delays, many painful drawings-back, many powerful temptations to forsake the newly-adopted creed, and the Saviour who proclaims it; and all these impediments may be traced to the species of mental indulgence to which I have alluded, sometimes to the bewildering mazes of metaphysics, but still more often to the intoxicating charms of poetry, or the highly-wrought or falsely-coloured fictions of romance. If I am now addressing any of you, to whom what I have just remarked is applicable, I would earnestly desire to prevail with you on this point. You are not giving the Gospel of a crucified Saviour and a merciful God a fair and reasonable hope of success; if you desire to be in earnest in the great work of salvation, you must treat it as if it were, what in truth it is, the one great object of life; you must renounce, as far as you can, consistently with the duties of life, every pursuit and every enjoyment which interferes with its effects upon your mind, or which loosens its hold upon your heart, and give up yourself wholly and unreservedly to its blessed and sanctifying influences.

Then, and not till then, shall we be enabled to re-

joice that the word of the Lord is growing mightily and prevailing; then, and not till then, shall we be enabled to "thank God and take courage," believing that you are an accepted servant of our God, and shall hereafter be "our joy and crown of rejoicing," in the eternal presence of the Lord of glory.

LECTURE XIV.

Acts xx. 24.

NONE OF THESE THINGS MOVE ME, NEITHER COUNT I MY LIFE DEAR UNTO MYSELF, SO THAT I MIGHT FINISH MY COURSE WITH JOY, AND THE MINISTRY WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE LORD JESUS, TO TESTIFY THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

AT the close of the last lecture we left St. Paul at Ephesus, where two of the most important years of his valuable ministry were employed. It appears from the history that his departure thence was hastened by one of those popular tumults which so often disgraced the most polished cities of antiquity, and which have not entirely disappeared under the civilizing influences of Christianity itself. St. Paul, however, having been preserved by the providence of God, through the instrumentality of his friends, from all the dangers of the outrage which occurred in the Ephesian theatre, it is unnecessary for us to dwell upon it.

Having spent some months in the tour through Macedonia and Greece, he landed, upon his return, at Troas.

While there, an accident occurred, trifling indeed in itself, but valuable as marking the character of the apostle, and evincing the divine power with which he was endowed. On the Lord's day, which even

thus early was obviously a day set apart for divine ordinances in the church of Christ, on the evening of this day, the last of St. Paul's residence among them, the Christians at Troas having united together in the celebration of the Lord's supper, St. Paul preached unto them; there were yet no temples rescued from the power of the evil spirit, to whose worship they had been for ages prostituted; and the infant church of the Redeemer, despised and rejected, like that Redeemer Himself, had not where to lay her head. On the present occasion, therefore, all the Christians in Troas were gathered together in a large upper chamber; in which, says the evangelist, "were many lights," probably to mark the boldness of these early believers, who, although dwelling in the midst of foes, courted neither darkness nor concealment. Anxious, no doubt, to improve to the very utmost this last opportunity, St. Paul continued his discourse even until midnight: some, perhaps most of his hearers, delighted in these lengthened instructions, and would willingly have sat through many a livelong night, like Lydia, to "attend to the things which were spoken by Paul:" but all have neither the same interest in spiritual things, nor the same powers of attention, even when they are interested. On the present occasion we are told that "there sat in a window a certain young man, named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." The apostle, full of kindness and sympathy, instead of feeling offended at the neglect of his preaching, thus too palpably evinced, immediately stopped his discourse, and without waiting till they should bring up the body of this

unfortunate young man, hastened himself, and "went down and fell on him, and embracing him, said, Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him." Not one word of reproof, or even of expostulation; but while he wrought this surprising miracle, he accompanied it by such acts of affectionate kindness and tenderness as should remove all feelings from the mind of the sufferer, except those of gratitude to God for so miraculous and merciful a deliverance.

The incident which we have just read may, perhaps, be allowed to furnish a caution with regard to your family exercises of devotion. If these are so lengthened out as to produce weariness, they not only fail of their purpose, but they provoke those very persons to sin whom you desire to benefit. When, therefore, you assemble your households for these important duties, avoid long prayers, long expositions, or the reading long portions of scripture. After the labours of the day more especially, your domestics cannot possibly benefit by these lengthened services; and we believe that from a want of due regard to this fact, many are led to consider family prayers as a burden, instead of enjoying them as a solace and delight.

Perhaps there is not much need in the present times to apply this story literally to yourselves. Few in these days actually sleep under sermons. In the times of our forefathers, when the hour-glass was placed by the side of the preacher, and reversed more than even once or twice during a single discourse, such things might occur; at present they are doubtless rare, and except in some solitary instance, to be found in every congregation, almost unknown. And yet while I say and believe this, I should be very reluc-

tant to aver, that there was no Eutychus even here present this day. Are there none among you, my brethren, who without closing your eyes are still asleep, even while in God's house, to all purposes of religious instruction, or spiritual improvement,—your thoughts wandering through the infinite space of worldly follies and foolish imaginations, your hearts untouched by the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and your minds unedified even while under the preaching of His word. Your bodies, indeed, seated in God's house of prayer, but your thoughts and feelings all absent, busily employed in the service of another Master? For such, if such there be amongst us even at this moment, I would earnestly pray that the same Spirit by whose wisdom St. Paul spake, and by whose power he called back the departed life of Eutychus, might speak this day to their slumbering souls, and say, with a power and unction which man cannot imitate, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

St. Paul having left Troas the following morning, and sailing by Chios and Samos, names well known to the lovers of Grecian story, tarried at Trogyllium, and the next day came to Miletus. As Miletus was the nearest port to Ephesus, we might perhaps, for a moment, feel surprised that St. Paul should thus be in the immediate neighbourhood of some of his dearest friends, without visiting them. The reason, however, is explained by the evangelist, who tells us in the 16th verse, "Paul had determined to sail by" or past, "Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia; for he hasted, if it were possible, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost."

While thus about his Master's business, he was resolved not to spend the time even in the endearments of Christian society. He would not, therefore, trust himself among the hospitalities of his Ephesian friends, but "passed by Ephesus," without casting anchor, until he had reached Miletus. So strong, however, were the feelings of affection for his Christian brethren in the breast of the apostle, that he could not prevail upon himself to forsake that region altogether, without one parting interview with those among whom his ministrations had been so abundantly blessed.

He accordingly sent from Miletus "to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church," and when they were come to him, he addressed them in a speech replete with so much important Christian doctrine, and so many touches of Christian feeling, that we cannot employ the remainder of this lecture more profitably than in a partial consideration of it.

"Ye know," said this great apostle, addressing himself to the elders of the Ephesian church, who, we may well imagine, gathered round him with no ordinary feelings of interest and delight, "Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews." There is nothing more striking throughout the whole of St. Paul's writings and discourses, than the remarkable vein of tenderness which pervades them: if speaking, as in the present instance, of his labours among his friends, he is not ashamed to say, "I have been with you with many tears;" if writing, as he does to his beloved Philippian converts,

of those who were even the "enemies of the cross of Christ," he still says, "of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping."

How beautiful a feature in the character of such a man! So much tenderness united to so much energy: the very softness of a woman to the indomitable spirit of a hero. What a pattern to the Christian minister, that while in his own person he is "enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," he may, in his conduct to others, imitate the Christ-like spirit of him who could say, "We are gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children; so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us;" that, while as the minister of God, he is inflicting, as he is too often called to do, like a wise physician, many a deep and painful wound, he may learn to feel, and even to weep, for those upon whom his prayers and labours have been wasted, and to whom the blessed Gospel of a loving Saviour, has only been the "savour of death unto death."

St. Paul continues, ye know "how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ."

As in the opening of this address, we have been enabled to trace something of the feelings with which St. Paul instructed, here we may learn something of the manner and of the matter of his instructions.

First, for the *manner* of it: he did not content himself with occasionally or partially ministering in

the word and ordinances of his divine Master, but like that divine Master himself, he was "instant in season and out of season." He says, "Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia,"—he had not, then, lost a single day since he first came among them, a single hour of the precious talent of time which God had committed to him,—“I have been with you at all seasons,” in your times of sorrow, as well as joy; in your days of mourning, as well as of social intercourse; “I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you.” Would to God, brethren, that we could unite in this declaration of the apostle; but alas! here our own heart condemns us; many are the profitable truths, and reproofs, and consolations, which we have kept back, not indeed willingly, but of necessity, because our own minds have overlooked them, or our own hearts have not duly felt and appreciated them.

There was no such dereliction on the part of St. Paul, for he spake at all times as he was “moved by the Holy Ghost.” He proceeds to remind them that he had not confined these truths to his public ministrations, he taught them privately, and “from house to house,” setting forth the truths of the divine word in their families, as well as in their congregations, and teaching them to tell of divine things, as Israel of old, “at their sitting down and rising up.” It is one of the misfortunes which can never be sufficiently deplored, in the present state of our own Church establishment, that from the overgrown size of many of our parochial charges, and the multiplicity of the duties thus entailed upon the ministers, it is utterly impossible, even were they possessed of the perseverance of an apostle and the strength of an

angel, adequately to imitate this example of St. Paul. To endeavour after it to the utmost of our power is no less our pleasure than our duty, for we are well convinced that the seed sown in our public services, does most essentially need the culture and superintendence of private and personal visitation. "There is a charm in the week-day services of a parish minister," says Dr. Chalmers, "which has not been duly estimated, either by philanthropists or patriots. His official and recognised character furnishes him with a ready passport to every habitation: and he will soon find, that a visit to the house of a parishioner is the surest way of finding access to his heart. Even the hardest and most hopeless in vice, cannot altogether withstand this influence: and at times in their own domestic history, there are opportunities, whether by sickness, or disaster, or death, which afford a weighty advantage to the Christian kindness that is brought to bear upon them. His week-day attentions and their Sabbath attendance, go hand in hand." "It is thus that a house-going minister wins for himself a church-going people."

But, my brethren, there is a sense in which a house-going minister may be the very contrast of St. Paul: he may be the agreeable companion, always ready to join your social parties, and partake of every frivolous amusement of the passing hour; or even the intellectual associate, ready to converse with you sensibly and rationally upon men and manners, and books and politics, and yet his domiciliary visits may form no part of the apostle's plan, and follow no portion of his example. A minister at a card-table, for instance, or a minister in a ball-room, may, indeed, be a "house-going minister;" but it may be to counteract during

the week all that has been done on the sabbath, and to destroy by the emptiness and frivolity of his personal character all the dignity of his high and holy office. For a minister to visit usefully, he must visit as a minister. He must go to you at all times as the accredited messenger of his divine Master, and with something of the feelings of that divine Master himself, when He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished;" his feelings must be, I have a message to deliver, and how am I straitened until it be received in the love and in the power of it, into the heart of every soul committed to my charge.

While such is the spirit in which he must visit you, this is the spirit in which you must receive him; you must not be ashamed to speak to him of his Master; you must desire to hear of the things belonging to your peace; you must consider that his time is too precious to be wasted in the ceremonials of life; and at the close of an evening spent in rational and Christian intercourse, it is well that a more direct act of ministerial duty be performed, and that, as St. Paul himself expresses it in his instructions to Timothy, all such intercourse "be sanctified by the word of God, and prayer."

This was evidently the manner in which St. Paul entered into society, or he could not have thus solemnly called his friends and hearers to bear witness that he had "testified *from house to house*," "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ."

Secondly, we observe from this passage the *matter* of St. Paul's communications, "Repentance towards God." I would remind you that repentance

here means, not merely sorrow for sin, but a change of life, a turning of the heart to God, in fact, a real soul-saving conversion. St. Paul preached this as a duty binding upon every human being to whom he spoke, for his own words are, "God now commandeth all men every where to repent." He preached it also as a blessed and gratuitous privilege, for he distinctly says, "Jesus hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel." Thus did he preach "repentance towards God." He also preached "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," as the only way to the Father, the only hope for the sinner, the only grace which by "putting on Christ," shall enable you to appear complete in Him, and to "bring forth fruit unto life eternal."

"And now, brethren," continues the apostle, after thus describing, with a brief and beautiful simplicity, the *manner* and the *matter* of his ministerial teaching, "Behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there." Blessed arrangement of the divine dispensation! Had even a St. Paul known all things that should befall him, the labours and the stripes, the prisons and the perils, the "weariness and painfulness," the watchings and fastings, the "cold and nakedness," which at a later day he was enabled to look back upon with triumph, even his faith, strong and ardent though it was, might have sunk appalled before the unequal conflict. Thanks be to God, brethren, that we "know not the things which shall befall" us during the year, the week, the day, which has commenced; that our heavenly Father has in mercy drawn a curtain, which mortal eye can never penetrate, between the feelings of the present hour, and the painful reali-

ties of the future. How many a scene of harmless pleasure would be marred, how many an hour of innocent enjoyment broken up, if each one present were cursed with a passing vision of all that should befall him! It is enough for the child of God to know that his "strength shall be equal to his day," he knows not—for worlds he would not know—what that day may bring forth.

This blissful ignorance, although not removed, was permitted to be partially dispelled in the case of St. Paul; he was not left without a hint of the sorrows which awaited him, for he adds, "Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me."

Thus far, then, his eyes were supernaturally opened; how melancholy a prospect would this have revealed to the man who is living for time; how cheering to him who was living for eternity! The road before him was indeed dark, the cloud above it lowering, but the eye of faith could distinguish in the distance, "the crown of glory," and many a radiant beam glanced from it to cheer the sufferer on his heaven-ward way. In every city he was certain to encounter "bonds and afflictions," but in every city he was equally sure to meet a Saviour and a friend; one who, when he told the apostle, in the first hours of his conversion, what "great things he should suffer for His name's sake," also told him "certainly I will be with thee." One who never yet has called even the lowest of His followers to bear His cross, without accompanying it with His crown; and never yet has presented the cup of sorrow to the weakest of His flock, without pouring into it the strong consolations of His love.

St. Paul, therefore, scruples not to speak of these things as a "light affliction;" for he immediately adds, "but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

Most beautiful picture of the calm and unshrinking resolution of the Christian hero! If he might but faithfully conclude the ministry he had received, and successfully testify the Gospel which he loved, every trial was overlooked, every difficulty forgotten.

"None of these things move me," Was the apostle, then, a man of so hard a nature, and so insensible a temperament, that, like the stoics of old, upon him sufferings and sorrow had lost their power? Far, very far from it. We have seen, even in this discourse, that he could feel most acutely, nay even weep, for the dangers of the thoughtless, and the condemnation of the guilty; and did he who felt for all mankind possess no feeling for himself? Doubtless he did feel, and feel most deeply; doubtless he was, in this sense, "moved" by the prospect of these bonds and afflictions, but he was not so moved as to hesitate for a moment in his onward course, to shrink back a single footstep from the impending danger. He had within his breast a principle which no difficulty could daunt, no trials terrify,—that principle was a deep, a heartfelt, an all-engrossing love of his Redeemer.

In comparison of that Redeemer, his ministry, his Gospel, his honour, his glory, the world and its delights, life and its attractions, were as light and eva-

nescent as the motes which dance upon the sun-beam; for that Redeemer, as the apostle himself declares, "he had suffered the loss of all things, and did count them but dung, that he might win Christ:" and with that Redeemer he hoped to spend a glorious and a blessed eternity. We can, therefore, readily believe that, "none of these things moved" him: his heart was calm amidst tumultuous motion, and while every wind which blew only drove him closer to the Rock of ages, every rising surge but lifted him the higher from the earth, and raised him the nearer, even upon the very waters of affliction themselves, to the haven which awaited him.

My beloved brethren, you, as well as he of whom we speak, have all a course to run; to some probably a long, and an arduous, and a troublous one; many sorrows, many afflictions, abide you. To others the sun may even now ride high in the heavens; and to not a few, the pale gray tints of evening may have set in. Do you, with this apostle, desire to "finish your course with joy?" Surely I need not make the inquiry. You do desire it: for I speak to those among you whose "faith hath made them the sons of God." To you it is the subject of many an anxious thought, of many a fervent prayer; in moments of solitude, of calm and quiet reflection, when the bustle of this busy world is thrown aside, in the silence of your chambers, in the sleepless hours of midnight, this aspiration often bursts from your lips, or arises unuttered in your heart, O, "that I might finish my course with joy!" that I might be able to look with a more perfect assurance upon a chamber of sickness and a bed of death.

Brethren, the one great principle of which I have

spoken, the love of Christ, is as powerful at the present moment as it was eighteen hundred years ago: do not disparage it by doubting its efficacy, or undervaluing its power. Be assured, if you possess it, it will do for you what it is daily doing for thousands, what it did for St. Paul: troubles, sorrows, trials, "none of these things shall move you," or loosen the anchor which you have cast within the veil; be of good courage, trusting implicitly to that all-sufficient Saviour, and living obediently in His fear and love, you shall "finish your course with joy;" it may not be, it probably will not be, amidst the raptures of a triumph, but it shall be with the peaceful composure of one who enjoys the fruits of a victory which his own right arm could not have purchased; you shall ere long be enabled to say, "Thanks be to God, who hath given me the victory, through my Lord Jesus Christ."

LECTURE XV.

Acts xx. 36—38.

AND WHEN HE HAD THUS SPOKEN, HE KNEELED DOWN AND PRAYED WITH THEM ALL. AND THEY ALL WEPT SORE, AND FELL ON PAUL'S NECK, AND KISSED HIM, SORROWING MOST OF ALL FOR THE WORDS WHICH HE SPAKE, THAT THEY SHOULD SEE HIS FACE NO MORE.

WE are in the present lecture to continue our remarks upon the parting address of St. Paul to the elders of the Ephesian church: an address so replete with affectionate feeling and sound and profitable Christian advice, that every word is dear to us, and every sentence worthy to be engraven upon our hearts.

“And now,” continues the apostle in the 25th verse, “behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.”

To enter into the feeling with which these words were spoken by St. Paul, or received by his hearers, you must know, *experimentally*, something of the blessed and delightful union existing between a Christian minister and a Christian people. The present, indeed, are days in which many of the strongest ties of this spiritual relationship have been broken. There is much “running to and fro” in the religious world, and, no doubt, “knowledge is increased:” but there

is little of that sober, contented attendance upon one stated ministry, so highly valued in the best ages of our church, so eminently fruitful in scriptural advantages to the soul, and so conducive to the promotion of the feeling to which I allude. Blessed be God, however, such things, though *rare*, are not, even yet, *absolutely unknown*. There still are churches in this favoured land, in which the minister can trace, sabbath after sabbath, throughout the year, the same occupiers of the same seats; a people, contented with scriptural truth, unadorned by any of the artificial trappings of human eloquence; a people, loving the word of God for its own sake, and desiring "the sincere milk of that word, that they may *grow* thereby;" churches, in which the same happy and devoted company assemble, time after time, around the table of their common Lord, and when any work of faith or labour of love is to be performed, come forward readily and cheerfully with the feelings and almost with the language of God's people of old, "Here am I, send *me*:" thus "bearing one another's burdens," and endeavouring so to "fulfil the law of Christ."

If there were nothing of this feeling among us, my beloved brethren, I should despair of interesting you in our subject for this morning; for while the connexion between the Christian minister and the people committed to his charge, between the spiritual father and his spiritual children, is the dearest, closest, and most durable which exists on earth, the strongest bond on this side of heaven, it is, to the people of the world, an unintelligible mystery, which they neither possess the necessary knowledge to appreciate, nor the necessary sympathies to feel.

I need not say that it was deeply felt and cherished

by St. Paul: and so perfectly aware was he of the reciprocity of this feeling, that he feared not the charge of egotism when he commenced this portion of his address in the words which I have read to you: "I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more."

It was not the language of despondency, or the mere anticipation of a probable evil, it was the calm and settled conviction of one who spake by direct inspiration from the Spirit of God, "*I know*" that this is the last time we shall meet on earth. What earnestness must this knowledge have given to him who spake; what breathless attention, what ardent desire to treasure up every word that fell from his lips, on the part of those who heard. This was, indeed, speaking "as dying unto dying men." And is such a feeling as this to be reserved only for these great occasions? Ought there not to be something of it both on your parts and my own, brethren, every time we thus meet? We do not "*know*" that it shall be the last time; but is there no reason to fear that the identical congregation now assembled, every man, every woman, every child who composes it, shall never again reassemble, until they together hear the sound of the Archangel's trumpet, and stand together before the judgment-seat of Christ? What zeal, what heart-affecting zeal, should such a thought produce in the minister; what prayerful anxiety to benefit by the word spoken, in that, which to each may be his last discourse, should be excited in every individual in the congregation?

St. Paul, having thus secured a deep attention, proceeds; "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not

shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God." May we, then, venture to hope from this, that St. Paul's ministry had been so prosperous, so uniformly successful, that not one soul had perished under it, that not one sinner had ever been hardened by those beams of the Sun of Righteousness, which, through his instrumentality, had subdued, and softened and melted others? No—we cannot hope this, even from the preaching of St. Paul; that some even of his hearers fell away we cannot doubt; that one, at least, even at Ephesus, openly withstood his words, he tells us himself, (2 Tim. iv. 15;) that many heard, and neglected, and perished, there is too much reason to fear. How, then, could he declare that he was pure from the blood of all men? When I say unto the wicked, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die," if thou dost *not* speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at your hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked from his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." Such are the words of God himself. St. Paul was, therefore, pure from the blood of all men, not because all to whom he preached were saved, but because he had not "shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God." If they perished, their blood was upon their own heads, he was safe.

My brethren, if you value your own souls, if you love your ministers, can you, with such declarations as these before you, desire them to "speak unto you smooth things," to "prophecy deceits," to declare only such things as are palatable, such truths as even the natural heart can bear without reluctance or mis-

giving? These will not profit you. There are many among you even now, we have too much reason to fear, who are sunk in indifference and self-indulgence, from which nothing but the most awakening appeals and the strong hand of our God can draw them; there are some, we fear, even at this moment, with the name of God upon their lips, and, as they imagine, His seal upon their forehead, living in a course of unhallowed enjoyment, or of secret sin; these are they to whom St. Jude refers, when having said, "Of some have compassion, making a difference," he adds, "and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." It must be a holy violence alone which can disturb, and arouse, and alarm, and deliver them; gentle means have been tried, and tried in vain. They know the truths of the Gospel, they have enjoyed its promises, they have cast aside its threatenings, they have trifled with its commands, its "still small voice" passes by them as the mere whisper of the summer breeze, they need the "great and strong wind," "the fire," and "the earthquake," before they will ever humble themselves, and turn wholly and devotedly to the God of their salvation. This, therefore, should be their language to us, Be faithful, be honest, be bold and uncompromising; our wounds are deep, probe deeply, or you will never heal them; our hearts are hard, strike powerfully, or you will never break them; if left to ourselves, we should choose only a part of the counsel of God; but do not "shun to declare" unto us all, tell us the whole, tell us the worst, that we may be led to fly from the wrath to come.

Brethren, according to our ability, we desire to do so, we desire to "cry aloud and spare not," to set our face as a flint, to lift up our voice as a trumpet,

to keep back nothing which can profit you, however painful; but, alas! "Who is sufficient for these things?" Even St. Paul did not affirm that he *had* declared to them the whole counsel of God, but that he had "not *shunned* to declare" it, so far as the Spirit gave him utterance. He had spoken plainly and boldly, but even he did not venture to say that there was no single truth in the counsel of God which he had not laid before them, no threatening which he had not urged to the very utmost, no proof of redeeming love which he had not magnified to the extreme limits of its illimitable extent, no weapons in heaven's armory with which he had not pressed them, no gem in its treasury with which he had not presented them. If St. Paul could not say this, what then can we say? We can only say, "Brethren, pray for us, that whatever be the remedies which your maladies require, however distasteful, or however painful, we may not shun to offer them; nor you, as you value your soul's present health and future happiness, to receive and to profit by them.

In the succeeding verses St. Paul, having given some valuable directions to the elders of the Ephesian church, thus affectingly commits them to the holy keeping of their heavenly Father: "And now, brethren, *I commend you to God*, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." We can readily imagine that the hearts and thoughts of all those whom St. Paul addressed were, at this trying hour, fixed upon *himself*. How happy must the apostle, then, have felt at being thus able, at a moment when he could no longer aid, no more instruct them, to point them to One from whom

“neither life, nor death,” nor time, nor eternity, could ever separate them. “I commend you to *God*,” to Him in whom is all fulness of protection, all abundance of power, all infinity of love. Such a declaration at such an hour was most emphatically saying, “Cease ye from man,” and go for the supply of all your temporal wants, for the relief of all your spiritual necessities, to the great God of heaven and earth, who shall supply all your need. This, my brethren, is a lesson you cannot learn too early or too well; “Cease ye from man:” the best of Christians, the best of ministers, are but erring, sinning mortals, “men of like passions with yourselves;” creatures of the dust, to whom, in the language of the wise man, “the grasshopper will soon become a burden,” and who “fall before the moth.” You must learn to live above them, and, if needs be, to live without them; to go at once to their Father and your Father, to their God and your God; to seek from the ever-flowing fountain those waters of life, which are never so pure, so soul-reviving, and soul-strengthening, as when drawn directly from the font itself. For valuable as Christian friends and Christian ministers undoubtedly are, as instruments in the hands of God to you for good, still they are but instruments, poor, perishing instruments, and can impart a blessing only so long and so effectually as the God who employs them is pleased, in mercy, to permit.

St. Paul, therefore, commends those whom he was leaving, not to man, not even to Timothy, his successor and his “own son in the faith,” but to God and to the word of His grace, as “able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” How comforting to Christian friends,

when about to separate, to be able thus to commend each other to an unseen God, to an all-present Saviour, and to a revealed and written word. There may be many, in passing through life, in whose spiritual welfare you are deeply interested, and yet from whom you are constantly and necessarily absent; many, perhaps, so circumstanced, that they are unable to partake of the spiritual advantages under which you live; how highly encouraging, then, is it, that in all such cases you are able to commend them, not only to God, but to His written word, which, thanks be to God, in this favoured country, cannot be taken from them, and which St. Paul here distinctly declares "is able to build them up" for their future and unfading inheritance. Bear this in mind, brethren, in all your communications with persons so circumstanced; it is, indeed, a serious privation that they should be distant from the life-giving ordinances of a gospel ministry, but it is not, in cases over which the inclination has no control, an irreparable privation. In commending your friends, so situated, to God, commend them also with confidence to "the word of His grace," if, as Chillingworth has truly declared, "the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants," you are here on sure and certain ground; ministers may be taken from them, or may even mislead them; "grievous wolves shall enter in, not sparing the flock," but amid the green pastures and still waters of the "word of God's grace," and under the guidance of the Chief Shepherd, the weakest lamb of the fold shall neither stumble nor fall. If you are unable to do more than this for those you love, you cannot, you ought not, to do less: urge them by every consideration most awakening

and most influential, urge them by the value of that soul within them which is perishing for lack of knowledge, and by the Saviour who died for its redemption, to search the word of God's grace frequently, daily; however small the portion to which their time and opportunities may limit them, if it be accompanied by earnest, fervent prayer, it shall not be lost: it is an omnipotent word, it cannot return void to Him who sends it, but is powerful through God, to the pulling down of the strong-holds of ignorance and sin, and to the building up to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" "all them who are sanctified." Many, many souls now beyond the reach of temptation and trial, have been led to God through the instrumentality of the written word alone, unaided by human comments or human teaching; and however man, in the pride of his vaunted wisdom, or rather of his matchless ignorance, may pronounce the revealed word of our God too deep for the unlearned, and too obscure for the young, and too complicated for the simple, on that great and coming day when all hearts shall be laid open and all histories told, God will vindicate His word to the confusion of His enemies, and will prove before assembled worlds that infinite in wisdom, He well knew without the aid of man, how to speak to the heart and to the soul of the poorest, weakest, most degraded of the sons of fallen Adam.

St. Paul having committed his brethren to God's holy keeping, and reminded them of that noble disinterestedness which formed so striking a feature in his character, concludes by urging them to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." There is

something not unworthy of remark in the manner in which the apostle thus terminates his parting address; he finishes with an injunction of his Master, and one, valuable as it is, which had been omitted by all the evangelists. He does not, like an accomplished orator, at the close of his discourse concentrate the thoughts and the affections of his hearers upon himself, but by one of the most touching turns throughout the whole address, he leads them past himself to the Saviour whom he loved, and reminds them of one of the most beautiful observations of that Saviour which had been overlooked by the evangelists, amidst the riches of the gospel feast, but is now gathered up by St. Paul as one of the fragments that had fallen from the Master's table.

“And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.” How deeply affecting must such a parting as this have been! the *last time* they should see his face in the flesh, who had been the blessed instrument of leading them to see God's face in the spirit! If it be much to part with Christian friends, even for a little season, with every hope of again embracing them on earth, how much more is it to look upon them for the last time, to hear the last word, to receive the last sigh, to know that the sweet counsels we have taken together have drawn to a close, that our meetings in Christian fellowship here are over, that the House of our God and the Table of our Lord shall be visited together no more. This is, indeed, among the trying, among the most trying visitations of the children of God, and to this, St. Paul

and his brethren were now summoned: we are not, therefore, surprised to find that the apostle himself was not unmoved, that no eye was without tears,—“they *all* wept sore;” and yet that parting hour was not without its pleasures, “he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.” What a comfort to the Christian in every hour of trial or of sorrow, is prayer! an intercourse with his Lord which no power on earth can interrupt. Would that the Holy Spirit had seen fit to record this prayer of the apostle, how valuable a gift would it have been in this parting world! But although we know not what the apostle said, we cannot be ignorant of what he felt; for the heart of man answereth to the heart of man, “as in water face answereth to face.” Doubtless the desires of his heart were, that his own bodily presence might be more than supplied to those he loved, by the spiritual presence of his Master; that amidst all the trials and temptations of the world in which he left them, they might be “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,” and that it would please God “shortly to accomplish the number of His elect, and to hasten His kingdom,” that both he and they might again meet, but in a land where the tear of parting never falls, and that sad word, “Farewell,” is never spoken.

The chapter concludes by informing us that “they accompanied him unto the ship.” Desirous of going as far, and remaining as long with him as was permitted them, they went with the apostle even to the water’s edge, yet there they were compelled to leave him. Beloved brethren, it is an affecting thought that there is a point at which our dearest bonds must be broken, our closest relationships dissolved, our most attached friends leave us—a point at which husbands and wives,

parents and children, ministers and people, must part. We may travel together long, profitably, and peacefully, but it cannot be uninterruptedly. A parting hour must arrive, when "one shall be taken and the other left." Both may go together to the water's edge, but you must enter those waters singly and alone—Jordan must be passed, and on its banks all that is earthly must be left behind.—Would you so part that you may be re-united, that when that flood is crossed, you may meet again in the celestial city? It is now within your power—the offer, the hope, the certainty, are all within your reach. Instead of separating from those you love with the feeling of those Ephesian Christians, "we shall see his face no more," in all your separations, even the most painful and the last, if you are, indeed, the children of the same Saviour, the possessors of the same hope, anchored within the veil, sure and steadfast, your feelings may rightly be, 'Blessed be God, we shall see their face again.' This is a sharp trial, but it is a short one. The river is stormy, and its floods are deep, but it is neither wide nor impassable; and although our truly scriptural church has most affectingly taught us to say, "Suffer us not, through any pains of death, to fall from Thee," yet may we humbly hope that no child of God was ever lost in those dark waters, for has not your Lord himself declared by the mouth of His prophet, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." He now offers himself as your guardian and your guide; He who, when all other friends must leave you at the brink, will descend with you into the troubled waves, and still them with His voice, and bear you up in His arms amidst

the "swellings of Jordan," and never leave you nor forsake you until He has carried you once again into the company of those you loved on earth, and from whom you shall be no more separated throughout eternity!

LECTURE XVI.

Acts xxi. 13.

**I AM READY NOT TO BE BOUND ONLY, BUT ALSO TO
DIE AT JERUSALEM, FOR THE NAME OF THE LORD
JESUS.**

St. Paul, after that affecting parting from his friends at Ephesus, which formed the conclusion of the last lecture, proceeded on his voyage to Jerusalem. We are informed in the third verse that he "landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unlade her burden." It is scarcely possible to read that well-known declaration of our Lord, "Wo unto thee, Chorazin, wo unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes," without feeling from that moment a melancholy interest in the fate of the cities thus alluded to. We are tempted to think, if this be true, if Tyre and Sidon would have so highly valued the means of grace, why were they not bestowed? And although we know that the apostle's answer to all such inquiries would be, "Nay, but, O man, who art thou, that repliest against God! Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another to dishonour?" yet it is impossible not to read with pleasure the fact which the evangelist an-

nounces, when he tells us that in Tyre, yes, in that city in which, but a few short years before, the name and the Gospel of the Saviour were alike unknown, there were now true and sincere believers, whole families, as it would appear, many families, who were disciples of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Though for a time passed over, therefore, these cities were not utterly rejected; and from the incidental mention of them before us, we have the comfort of knowing how speedily the truth of our Lord's declaration became apparent, by the fact that the Tyrians *did* receive to the salvation of their souls, that Saviour whom Chorazin and Bethsaida utterly rejected. Wherever the true disciples of Jesus were to be found, thither the affectionate apostle of whom we speak, seems always to have been irresistibly drawn, and there to have been willingly detained. Accordingly, for seven days St. Paul tarried at Tyre, enjoying the refreshment of Christian intercourse, and doubtless edifying the minds and strengthening the hearts of these Tyrian believers. While there, a circumstance occurred which at first sight is a little apt to perplex the simple reader of Holy Writ, for we are told in the fourth verse that these believers "said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem." You will recollect that we had been distinctly told in the preceding chapter by St. Paul himself, "I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem," proving that he went thither under the immediate direction of the Holy Ghost. When, therefore, we are here told that the disciples at Tyre attempted to dissuade him, "through the Spirit," from going up, we are apt to inquire, Can, then, the Holy Ghost contradict himself? can He change His purposes? can

He give one direction to His servants to-day, and a contrary one to-morrow? It is evident that this is impossible; all, therefore, that is intended by the expression before us is, that when the disciples at Tyre said to St. Paul, "through the Spirit," that he should not go, they spake through the information which the Spirit had given them of the apostle's intentions of going, and perhaps of his approaching trials, but by no means that the advice which they offered, was also through the same unchangeable Spirit. Indeed, the conduct of St. Paul sufficiently proves that this was not the fact, for he permitted neither their reasons nor their entreaties to possess the smallest weight with him, but at once, and without delay, prosecuted his intended journey. We are accordingly told in the following verse, "and when he had accomplished those days, we departed, and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city; and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed." How beautiful and affecting a scene was this,—the whole Christian population of Tyre assembled on the seashore at one great sacrifice of prayer and praise! It is to the true Christian alone that all the common events of life are thus sanctified and thus hallowed. His greetings, his partings, his social and domestic assemblies are all with God. His Father is excluded from no meeting, his Lord is absent from no parting in which a child of God is engaged. This is the realization, even while on earth, of that "communion of saints," and union with our glorified Head, which shall be perfected in the kingdom of our Father. The worldly man parts with his friends, his family, his nearest and closest connexions, and knows nothing

of the comfort of a parting prayer, nothing of the confidence which the feeling of an all-present God, and that God a covenant God, to whom he may commit those who are dear to Him, can alone impart: it is the true Christian only who can say, with Jacob of old, "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another."

St. Paul, while parting from these Tyrian disciples, was not, as at Ephesus, merely surrounded by the elders of the church; the wives and children of the believers were united with them in this affecting scene. It is delightful to discover by such little traits as these, how early and how important were the advancement in civilization produced by the gospel. In the most polished state of society in the heathen world, what was woman? A mere toy, a gilded bauble to help to while away a vacant hour, but admitted to no partnership in the higher and more elevating actions or feelings of human life. But no sooner did the Gospel, with its lessons of Christian love, find its way into the heart, than woman resumed that place in society to which God in His mercy had originally appointed her. She became the help-meet for man, his ready partner in every sorrow and in every joy; not merely the unintellectual companion of his pleasures, but the true and sympathizing friend, as valuable, perhaps more valuable, in the darker hours of sicknesses, and griefs, and trials, and partings, than in those brighter and happier moments in which alone she had, before the introduction of Christianity, been ever heard of. Every wife, and even every child, of these Tyrian converts, assembled upon this deeply interesting occasion; all accompanied the apostle; all knelt with him on the sea-shore; all

united with the beautiful equality of Christian love in his last prayer; and all were alike partakers of his parting blessing.

Wherever true religion, the religion of Jesus, advances, there does this Christian equality advance with it, never, indeed, interfering with that distinction so often and so plainly stated in God's own word, that "the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church," but elevating the wife to that distinguished place in Christian society, and investing her with that true dignity as far removed from the debased condition of the mere sensualist of the heathen world, as from the burlesque importance of the heroine of chivalry and romance.

After the abode of a single day at Ptolemais, we find from the evangelist that they who were of Paul's company came unto Cesarea, and entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven, and abode with him. We find from the sixth chapter of Acts, that Philip was one of those "seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom," of whom Stephen was chief, who were selected to distribute the alms of the primitive Christians in the daily ministration. We hear of him again in the eighth chapter, called by a remarkable interposition of Providence to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch, and after this service returning to Cesarea, where he was still dwelling at the time of the apostle's visit. Philip, who had now become an evangelist, which was an order in the church next in rank to the apostles themselves, gladly received St. Paul into his house. He was, evidently, a married man; a sufficient answer to the Romish dogma of the celibacy of the clergy in the first ages of Christianity. While

St. Paul and his companions tarried at his house, the following incident occurred, marking strongly the usages of those days, in which the symbolical mode of communicating ideas, so prevalent in the earlier times of the prophets, had not been entirely discontinued. "There came down from Judea a certain prophet named Agabus." This was the same person who seventeen years before, as we are told in the eleventh chapter, "had signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world;" the fulfilment of which prophecy (which had already taken place) would naturally make the disciples doubly anxious to hear what testimony so gifted a person would bear to the future destiny of their beloved St. Paul. Accordingly, when they were assembled together, Agabus "came unto them, and taking Paul's girdle, bound his own hands and feet with it, and said, 'Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

So truly had St. Paul declared in the preceding chapter, "the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city that bonds and afflictions abide me." In every city, almost in every house into which he entered, the same mournful note was struck; how deeply trying to the natural man, how appalling in the weaker moments and the more uncertain actings of faith even to the spiritual believer; yet was not this the whole with which St. Paul had to contend; it was not merely the constant prediction of approaching evil, but, far more difficult to bear, the equally constant weakness of misjudging friends. "When we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him not to

go up to Jerusalem." What is man, even at his best estate, but infirmity, but folly? "Both we," even "they of Paul's company," they who had heard the voice of God repeatedly calling his servant to the "great things he was to *suffer* for His name's sake," were just as anxious, just as solicitous as others, in urging him against the fulfilment of the divine command. Peter's "spare thyself," that faithless and faint-hearted advice which drew down from his divine Master the severest rebuke He ever uttered, has left behind it in the church a sadly influential example. To our blessed Lord, indeed, such faithless advice was perfectly innocuous. "When the prince of this world cometh, he hath nothing in me," said the perfect Jesus. He was holy, harmless, undefiled: there were no evil propensities in his breast, to form the ready allies of the powers of darkness. It was far different with St. Paul, it is far different with ourselves. Be careful, therefore, brethren, that you do not aid our spiritual enemies in their attacks upon the hearts of believers, by your mistaken affection, and exaggerated dangers, and unnecessary cautions. Satan is as often successful in this device as in any other of his exhaustless resources. Is a servant of God labouring in His great and blessed cause, whether it be in the instruction of children of the poor, or in visiting their dwellings, or even in the higher and more important duties of the ministry itself, with some little degree of energy, and earnestness, and zeal, however far below the great and urgent calls upon him, then there are sure to be those around him, often those of his own family, who are anxious to restrain his efforts and impede his usefulness by exaggerated

views of the danger to his health, of the importance of preserving himself for future services, (which may never arrive) and many other excuses equally plausible and equally serviceable in forwarding the great counter-scheme of our spiritual enemy, by deadening the efforts of the servants of the Lord. There is, I fear, often much of sin in this, although perhaps undiscovered by those who are guilty of it. It is a matter in which, surely, the counsel and the guidance of our God are fully sufficient to direct His servants; and when you are opposing what you consider only natural tastes and inclinations, how know you that you are not thwarting the dispensation of the Most High, and, in the end, may be found to have been fighting against God?

So was it, evidently, with St. Paul's friends at Caesarea, when they besought him not to go to that very place to which the good providence of God had so distinctly directed him. Observe his bold and truly faithful reply: "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart; for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." What sincere affection and tenderness mingled with his boldness! he confesses that the sight of his weeping friends would go nigh to break his heart, although he declares it could have no influence whatever upon his resolution. His course was taken in the strength, as well as at the bidding, of his Lord; and welcome bonds, welcome death itself, if he may but preach the Gospel which he loved, and die for the Saviour whom he adored. Happy will it be for every one among us, if we possess within our breasts this principle, even the love

of the Lord Jesus Christ, which can alone render us equal to such a sacrifice. It is true, that we are not called to bonds or to death, to testify the strength of our affection; but where is the Christian who carries about with him a body of sin and death, who is not called to a daily martyrdom, to a constant warfare, for that great name's sake. O, it is not at the stake that men usually shrink from the fiery trial, and deny the Lord who bought them: it is not there that their faith fails, and that they fall from their steadfastness, or disgrace their high and heavenly calling. For such an awful hour as that, there has usually been a long course of early preparation; prayer, earnest, faithful, persevering prayer, has been offered by them and for them, with unremitting fervour, and the good Spirit of our God, thus faithfully sought, does not desert His children at that trying season. No! it is amid the daily, hourly trifles of common life, in the sunshine of prosperity and the calm of uninterrupted peace, that the Christian too frequently makes shipwreck of his hope; like those gallant vessels of which all have read, which after weathering many a tempest, and outliving many a storm, have sunk in the harbour, when the sky was unclouded, and there was no ripple on the wave. These are the seasons, the sunshine hours of life, in which you most require the powerful and enduring principle of love to the Lord Jesus Christ to reign within your breast. The very same individual who, when the time of deadly trial came, would brace up his resolution to the requirement, and, strong in the strength of the Saviour whom he loved, would ascend the scaffold with unhesitating foot, or look with unblanched cheek upon

the fires of martyrdom, will shrink from an act of trifling self-denial, or cowardly turn aside from an acknowledged duty, or suppress an unpalatable opinion, from the indescribable and contemptible fear of men, whom, in his heart, he utterly despises. It is, then, for these lesser trials and petty martyrdoms that you must seek a deeper and more abiding sense of love to our adorable Redeemer; it is the only principle which can enable you to subdue your own wayward tempers, to correct your own rebellious will, to rise superior alike to the smiles or frowns of your fellow-sinners, and to "endure hardness," as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, whenever his name, or His honour, or his word, or His people, need your countenance and your support.

Continuing the narrative, we read, the well-meant advice of St. Paul's friends proving fruitless: "When he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

It would have been well had they said this sooner, and before they had caused the faithful and affectionate apostle so much unnecessary pain; but alas! brethren, how few are enabled to say and to feel this at all, how very few, precisely at the proper moment! It is the last lesson which the child of God learns perfectly, even in the school of affliction itself. Yet some there are, we trust, in every generation of God's people, who do learn and practise it, as those who have, indeed, been taught of God. It is recorded of the truly pious Fenelon, that, when standing by the dead body of his most valued friend, he gave utterance to this sublime and Christian sentiment: "There lies my friend, and, with him, all my hopes of earth-

ly happiness; but if the moving of a straw would bring him back to live again, I would not be the mover of that straw, without the will of my God, for a thousand worlds." This, indeed, is real Christianity, an entire conformity of man's will to God's will. Let this be your one great aim in passing through life, to know no will but God's; to have your own will so identified with God's will, so moulded into His, that nothing which he ordains, nothing which He permits, can disappoint, or grieve, or perplex you. There is nothing enthusiastic; nothing overstrained in this feeling; nothing which does not approve itself as readily to the soundest judgment, as to the most ardent affection. For what is God's will, upon every occasion which can occur in the life of a child of God? Is it not precisely that which, if you could see with perfect prescience, and arrange with perfect wisdom, you would, each for himself, unquestionably select? To the real Christian, it does not admit of a doubt that such is the fact; in the will of his Lord, whether manifested towards him in the way of sorrows or of joys, he simply sees the will of his Friend, One who so loved him, even while an enemy and an alien, as to die for him; One who surely cannot love him less, since he has brought him to himself. In every dispensation of the will of his Lord, therefore, he sees that which he is assured Eternity will unquestionably justify, by proving, even to his own comprehension, that every act of that will has been either among his needful food, or his necessary medicines, on the road which leads to Zion. Do I, then, at this moment address any to whom the dispensations of God's will have been often filled with sorrow; and,

in this vale of tears, where was there ever yet a large assemblage of Christians, in which no secret mourner found a place? I would say to you, Be not tempted to complain that however the "will of God" may thus be kindness and mercy to others, it is harshness and severity to you; that He has taken from you your most valued comforts or your most cherished joys; your health, your property, your husband, your wife, your child, your only child. If you are indeed a true believer, the severest privation will not induce you to rebel against the will of your God. Far, very far from it; although for the present "no chastening seemeth joyous, but grievous," as even St. Paul himself declares, yet it will not be long before you will do ample justice to Him who chastens you; when "patience has had her perfect work," and faith is once more in exercise, you will think nothing too good for God; you will even acknowledge, as was beautifully expressed by one of old, that "the choicest, the fairest, the sweetest flowers, are fittest for the bosom of God: that if He has taken the best flower in all your garden to plant it in a better soil, you have far more call for gratitude than for repinings, and you will still endeavour, prayerfully endeavour, to say from your heart, 'The will of the Lord be done.'"

Christian brethren, if you desire true peace of mind, even here below, you must endeavour to realize a large measure of this hallowed feeling: if you hope to join the worshippers in the courts above, you must, by grace, attain to its complete possession; your will must be swallowed up in God's will. Without this entire conformity, heaven would be no heaven to you, were you to find yourself, at this moment,

among its blessed inhabitants; for it is the will of God, and that alone, which awakens the harps of angels, and gives all the brightness to their crowns, and all the glory to their song; it is the will of God, and that alone, which throughout eternity, century by century, and year by year, and moment by moment, has sustained, and will sustain, the heaven of heavens, and all its unnumbered multitudes, from dropping into annihilation and perdition; it is the will of God, and that alone, for ever perfectly, cheerfully, and unceasingly fulfilled, which itself constitutes heaven. Surely, then, under every circumstance, the desire of our hearts should be, "The will of the Lord be done;" and our daily prayer, whether in acting or suffering, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

LECTURE XVII.

Acts xxi. 26.

THEN PAUL TOOK THE MEN, AND THE NEXT DAY PURIFYING HIMSELF WITH THEM, ENTERED INTO THE TEMPLE, TO SIGNIFY THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE DAYS OF PURIFICATION, UNTIL THAT AN OFFERING SHOULD BE OFFERED FOR EVERY ONE OF THEM.

AFTER a journey marked by those most affecting and instructive particulars which we have already reviewed, St. Paul arrived at Jerusalem. Here, had we not been forewarned of the contrary, we might have hoped that his trials and his troubles would have ceased; or if this were too much to expect for the sincere and faithful follower of our Lord in this world of sorrow, that, at any rate, some little respite might have been afforded for his solace and repose. From the circumstances which now present themselves, we shall find how erroneous would have been all such anticipations, that as the eventide approached, storms, and tempests thickened round his path, and that the clouds which now were gathering were never afterwards totally dispersed, but formed that dark and cheerless sunset in which his day of worldly services was closed for ever."

Upon arriving at Jerusalem, we read that "the brethren received him gladly," and that "the day follow-

ing he went in unto James, and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." How delightful must have been this meeting! How glorious the account which, by God's blessing, this faithful apostle was enabled to render! How must his hearers have rejoiced to listen to every detail of those wonderful achievements, far more interesting than were ever told to admiring senates by the conquerors of the earth, of the power of divine grace which, by "the foolishness of preaching," had overcome the philosophic pride of the Areopagite, and subdued the rugged nature of the barbarous jailor, with as much facility as it had melted the heart of the tender Lydia. Surely few eyes were dry in that assembly, when St. Paul narrated his parting scene with the elders at Ephesus, and when he told them, as he doubtless did, that he was come among them not to repose after such unparalleled labours, but to meet, cheerfully to meet, those bonds and imprisonments which had been predicted, in every city in which he had set his foot. When his narrative was concluded, we are informed, with the beautiful brevity of scripture history, "And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord." Blessed proof that they had been rightly instructed in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! They did not glorify the poor, weak, erring instrument of God's mercy, but they gave the glory, where alone it was due, to God Himself. They glorified that Lord, by whose grace St. Paul had himself been brought from a persecutor and blasphemer to be a believer and a son; by whose great Name alone he had

performed the wonders which had marked his course, and by whose good Spirit alone, he had been the honoured instrument of "turning many to righteousness."

The conference which follows, and the circumstances which grew out of it, are among the most difficult and perplexing points in the history we are pursuing; so perplexing, indeed, that from the fear of deciding wrongfully upon so contested a subject, I would most gladly have omitted it altogether, had I not felt myself bound, in justice to the duty in which I have engaged, to bring every incident of importance in the life of St. Paul plainly before you.

To understand the details of the circumstance upon which we are entering, I must remind you that the Jews, throughout the world, were divided at the time of which we are speaking, into three distinct and separate parties. First, there were the great majority of those who dwelt at Jerusalem who adhered nominally, at least, and many doubtless in sincerity, to the religion of their forefathers, believing Christianity to be a fable, and its author an impostor. Next, there was a body of converted Jews, probably not a very large one, who believed that, together with the reception of the Gospel, the observance of the laws and institutions of Moses were in all cases actually necessary to salvation; and that unless the believer in the Lord Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, were a circumcised attendant upon all the duties of the ceremonial law, his new religion would profit him nothing. Thirdly,—and the great mass of Jewish converts to Christianity were of this order,—there were many who retained all the institutions of Moses, together

with the faith they had recently adopted, but after the decided opinion given upon this subject, at the first general council held at Jerusalem,* did not believe that these institutions were actually necessary to their justification, and were content that the Gentile converts should not observe them, but were most determined and bigoted advocates for the maintenance of the ceremonial law by the Jewish converts.

Bearing these distinctions in mind, you will understand that it was this last class, to which the elders at Jerusalem, with their bishop St. James, alluded, when they thus addressed St. Paul at the conference of which we are now speaking: "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the law," that is, are all anxious that the ceremonial law of Moses should be observed and honoured; "and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."—"Do, therefore, this that we say unto thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads; and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law."—The elders concluded by affirming that they still adhered to the opinion given in the general council before alluded to, that the Gentile converts should observe "no such thing."

* See Lecture XI. History of St. Paul.

St. Paul, following the advice thus tendered, purified himself with the men who had already taken upon them the Nazarite's vow, and entered with them into the Temple, to observe the same ceremonies, and partake of the same ordinances. I mentioned, at the commencement of this incident, that it was most perplexing, and you will see at once whence this perplexity arises. The difficulty to determine, is this: Were the elders at Jerusalem justified in thus advising St. Paul, for the purposes of conciliation, to assume an interest in ceremonial observances, which they well knew were passing away, and to appear a rigid observer of that law at Jerusalem, which he had evidently discountenanced elsewhere? Again: Was St. Paul justified in acceding to their request, in identifying himself with these Judaizing Christians, and, for the purpose of overcoming an unworthy prejudice, in assisting to strengthen their respect for ordinances which his own more enlightened conscience told him were of none avail? We will endeavour to consider this in all humility and with all impartiality, only premising, that as St. Paul unquestionably erred in other instances, upon which we have already commented, there is nothing presumptuous in admitting the possibility that his conduct may not have been perfect upon this occasion. The Bible narrative makes no comment upon the good or evil which we find in any of its biographies, but simply states the circumstances as they occur, and then leaves them, when plainly narrated, to be judged of according to the ability which God gives us, and the promised aid of the divine Spirit. Bearing this in mind, we proceed, impartially, to consider St. Paul's conduct in the present in-

stance. First, then, Does it appear from what we have already seen of his history, that he was the scrupulous adherent of the ceremonial law, which the elders wished him to appear to be in the eyes of his brethren in Jerusalem? It is true that we are informed in the 16th chapter, that St. Paul, to meet the prejudices of the Jews, had consented to circumcise Timothy; and that upon another occasion we are told he had "shorn his head at Cenchrea, for he had a vow;" and these instances, therefore, might fairly be adduced to prove that he was not, upon every occasion, a determined neglecter of the ceremonial law: but are they not rather exceptions to his general course of conduct, than fair and uniform specimens of it? Do we not find him, in the second chapter of his epistle to the Galatians, speaking thus: "When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision." And a few verses after, in speaking of himself, he says, "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." Now it certainly appears that his conduct at Jerusalem was not perfectly in accordance with these declarations. We are aware that he did not mean to imply, by joining himself to the four Nazarites in the Temple, that such ceremonial observance was in the least degree necessary to salvation; but what did he intend to imply by it? His intention clearly was this; to convey to the converts at Jerusalem, who

were zealous for the law, something more than the mere belief that St. Paul considered it a matter of innocent superstition, or at the best, of indifference; it was evidently intended to demonstrate that St. Paul was, under no circumstances, a neglecter of that law, but, in fact, as habitual and consistent a keeper of it, as they themselves. "That all may know," is the reason given; "that all may know that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law." This, then, is the point which appears to stamp some degree of disingenuousness upon this action of the apostle. His epistles, whether to converted Gentiles or converted Jews, are full of declarations to the contrary. We hear him at one time saying to the Galatian converts, "Ye observe days and months, and times and years:" the new moons, and festivals, and sabbatical years of the Jews: and he immediately adds, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain: brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are." Be as free from all these ceremonial observances as you observe me to be, and mix nothing with the simple faith and independence of the Gospel. It may, indeed, be said that the Galatians having been heathens, St. Paul, who "became all things to all men, that he might by all means gain some," was justified in thus appearing before them indifferent to the law: and if he had confined all such observations entirely to his writings to those only who had once been Gentiles, there would be some weight in the objection; but this is not the fact, for we find him speaking quite as disrespectfully of the ceremonial law, in his epistle to the Hebrews, which was addressed expressly to the Jewish Christians in

Judea, as he does to the Galatians; and in the closing chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, he shows distinctly that the ceremonial law had passed away; and even asserts, "We have an altar," alluding to the Lord's Supper, "whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle;" implying that the observance of the Jewish ceremonial law was not compatible with the liberty wherewith Christ has made His people free; and that a strict adherence to it deprived the believer of his right to partake of Christian ordinances. Weighing, therefore, carefully all these circumstances, I would with humility state that I arrive at a conclusion different from that of some of our most judicious commentators, that, in this instance, both the elders at Jerusalem, and St. Paul himself, were too much influenced by the doctrine of expediency, and departed in some degree from "the simplicity that is in Christ." I cannot but think that for the sake of peace, from the hope of recommending the religion of the Lord Jesus to those whose views were as yet clouded by the remains of Jewish error, the apostle was led, in some degree, to temporize, to conform to customs, of which, in his conscience, he could not thoroughly approve, and thus, in some little degree, to descend from that lofty eminence upon which his fervent faith and undaunted courage had placed him, and to mingle too much in the arena with the weak, the worldly-minded, and the wavering, or at least with the bigoted, uncompromising, and uninformed.

It is scarcely possible to imagine any thing so disappointing to the good intentions of all engaged in it, as the event of this concession of the apostle. Speak-

ing after the fashion of men, it was the most disastrous circumstance of his life. Every thing that the elders had foreboded came immediately to pass, and their worst fears were realized by the very method they adopted to avert them. "The Jews which were of Asia," so the evangelist informs us, "when they saw him in the Temple," instead of being induced by this expedient to believe St. Paul to be a conscientious observer of the ceremonial law, "stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him," falsely accusing him of bringing Greeks into the Temple, and polluting the holy place. "And all the city was moved, and the people ran together, and they took Paul and drew him out of the Temple. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar; who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them; and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul." We dare not judge of the guilt or innocency of men's actions by their events, or we should say that the blessing of God certainly did not rest upon this act of carnal policy, for it immediately led to this cruel treatment, and subsequently to that long imprisonment and banishment of the apostle, from which he was never afterwards released; closing his days, as you are well aware, an exile, and, finally, a martyr, in a foreign land. Upon this, however, I would not raise the shadow of an argument; the present is not a world of retribution, either for good or evil; and many have been the actions of the best of men, which have brought with them disgrace, and obloquy, and death, and yet which shall assuredly receive the commendation of

our divine Master on that great and coming day. If, however, the view which we have taken, with respect to this action of the apostle, be the just one, it is impossible to pass it by, without attempting to derive from it the important lesson that it so plainly teaches; namely, That the real Christian should steadily, perseveringly, and undauntedly, preserve the straight and narrow path marked out for him by his Lord, and never, from a mistaken desire of conciliating the opponents of vital Christianity, swerve a single step, either as to doctrines or practice, from that which in his heart he believes to be the truth of God. The argument which we are for ever hearing, from the mouths of persons who advocate a certain degree of conformity to those who differ from us upon these great and essential subjects, is of this nature: Much may be done by meeting your opponents half way; if you give up a little of the non-essentials of religion, they will give up much of the spirit of hostility to its essentials in return. Your occasional intercourse in questionable pursuits with the people of the world, for instance, will produce a beneficial effect upon them; it will have a tendency to subdue their prejudices against a serious and scriptural view of divine truth, to conciliate their affections, or, at least, to increase their respect towards the people of God; and, above all, to render future opportunities of promoting their spiritual interests more easy to you. My brethren, —and I speak now only to those among you who have “tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost,” and confess it to be sinful to mingle in ungodly society for any other object than the charitable one to which I have alluded,

—I really believe this argument, notwithstanding its plausibility, to be most erroneous and most dangerous: *most erroneous*, because the word of God expressly declares that we shall “not do evil that good may come:” however minute the evil, and however apparently grand and magnificent the good, the principle remains the same, and if you value the word of your God, will not be intentionally violated by you: *most dangerous*, because it almost uniformly happens that, in endeavouring to benefit others, when not in the direct and obvious path of duty ourselves, we contract far more of evil than we impart of good. If you are desirous to work and to fight for God, you must never forget that no blessing is promised, no lasting success can result, unless you work with God’s tools, and fight with God’s weapons. Is it replied to this, that even our Lord “eat and drank with publicans and sinners,” and that none found fault with Him but the hypocritical Pharisees? We answer, our Lord came expressly “to seek and to save them that were lost;” and where should the Shepherd seek the wandering sheep, but in those strange pastures whither it has strayed?

This example, therefore, will not serve you, unless you can produce as plain a commission as our Lord, and unless you can show that you never enter into ungodly society except to bear as open, as uncompromising a testimony against its followers and its sins, as He did. Be assured that there is no common ground upon which the Christian and the worldling can meet with mutual benefit or safety, except it be simply for necessary worldly business, or the common civilities of life. To venture upon more than

this, unless where these legitimate exceptions, the ties of affinity, or the bonds of former friendship, demand it, "cometh of evil;" it is a grievous mistake to suppose that the world ever meets the Christian half way; the world will advance to meet you just so far as it can bring its follies, and its selfishness, and its hostility, to the spirituality of the doctrines and requirements of the Gospel with it, but not one step will it advance beyond it. There is no real reciprocity in its civilities: it yields nothing, it surrenders nothing; every renouncement must be made by the Christian, and by the Christian alone, in this unholy alliance; and in return for such renunciations, what do you obtain? For your sacrifice of conscience, of the will of your God, of the honour of your Redeemer, (for this will is broken, and this honour compromised by your concession,) the world proffers you its hollow flatteries, and its fallacious smiles, and its empty and worthless regards; and when it has deceived you into the acceptance and the love of them, it laughs to scorn, as a very by-word and a proverb, the Christian's weakness and the Christian's folly. Is it not so? Then look at compromising Christians in public life, men upon whose Christian conscientiousness large, very large demands are continually made and answered; what effect have their acknowledged Christian principles upon those who make such demands? Are these principles more honoured, more highly valued, more imitated? On the contrary, are not their wavering possessors pitied and prayed for by the humble, consistent Christian, despised by the very men with whom they act, respected by none? Look again at the compromising Christian in private

life; are his friends really led to honour religion more, because he has lowered the high and lofty standard of spirituality and holiness which she has unfurled above his head? Is he more useful in the circle in which he moves? is he more respected in his own family, who know him best? is he more honoured as the instrument of bringing sinners to his Lord?

Alas! my brethren, you know that the contrary to all this is unquestionably the fact, and that the man who, while he continued the bold and uncompromising soldier of the cross, was honoured, and respected, and beloved, by all whose regards were worthy of his possession, sinks into insignificance and uselessness, the moment his Master beholds the costly sacrifice at which he is willing to purchase the regards of an ungodly world. Be not then deceived, brethren, by the too successful delusion, that you can really serve the cause of God, and reconcile the people of the world to it, by unnecessarily mingling with them, and attracting to yourself their admiration and regards. There must usually be much given up, much suppressed, much practised on your part, which an enlightened and tender conscience ought to shrink from, before you can effect this. And, after all, how mortifying is this reflection, that if you are a child of God, it is only the unsanctified part of your character which the ungodly portion of the world delights in, for it is only the unsanctified part of your character which it can appreciate and understand.

Doubt yourself, therefore, examine yourself, pray to God "to try your very heart and reins," if you are popular in worldly society; depend upon it, it arises far more from the deficiency of Christian feel-

ings and Christian principles in your life and conversation, than from their excess. In exact proportion as you resemble your Lord in meekness, in lowliness, in poverty of spirit, in fidelity to the cause of your God, in bearing an open testimony against the practices of an ungodly world, you will resemble Him also in this, that "He was despised and rejected of men." Do not, therefore, for a little short-lived popularity, or dangerous enjoyment, or mistaken usefulness, descend from the dignified elevation of the true Christian, to mingle in the vain and heartless society of those whose tastes, and feelings, and pursuits, are hostile to the Spirit of your Lord's Gospel, and to the nature of His kingdom. "Now are ye the sons of God," says an apostle, speaking to the true believers of every age: how glorious an appellation! and can you, ought you, for any purpose and under any consideration, to make common cause with those, all of whose pursuits are lighter, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, than vanity itself, and too many of which have been pronounced to be, by the word of our God, far worse than this,—even "earthly, sensual, devilish." Such language will, I fear, to many, appear harsh and uncharitable, and even offensive, though it be the word of God Himself; but, my beloved brethren, this is too important a subject, and too deeply affecting the best interests of your eternity, to permit me to be very careful in that matter. Better, far better, that I should offend many, even by speaking harshly, which I would at no time willingly do, than that I should injure one by speaking ambiguously or obscurely upon so essential a point of Christian conduct. You cannot be told too often or too plainly,

that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God;" that by every concession, every compromise with His enemies, our Lord is "wounded in the house of His friends;" and that every instance of such conduct on the part of His believing people, while it grieves His divine Spirit, must eventually bring sorrow and suffering to their own hearts. I would, therefore, most solemnly address a few words to those among you, if such there be, who are at the present moment engaged in such a course as that which I am now deprecating. You have been led by the sovereign grace of God to take an interest in religion, of which those around you, perhaps, do not partake. You know, and by happy experience, the comfort of having, with Mary, "chosen that good part which shall not be taken from you." You do not sigh for the perishing pleasures of a perishing world, for they would not be pleasures to you, if they were spread in rich abundance at your feet; and yet, you are not without your temptations; you are continually led, sometimes by the mistaken desire of benefiting the cause of your divine Master, and more often by a certain softness of disposition and deficiency of moral courage, to yield to others upon points, on which your own conscience has no doubts; you carry St. Paul's maxim of "becoming all things to all men," to a most unholy and guilty extreme. When you are in the company of the people of the world, you agree with them, at least, you do not disagree with them, in sentiments which you would blush to avow before the most humble of your Christian friends; nor do you stop here; in actions as well as in words, the same system is pursued; you began, perhaps, by

imagining this was for the cause of truth, and for the purpose of reconciling others to that of which you knew, experimentally; the value and the blessedness. Deceive yourself so no longer! it is too often merely the natural cowardice of the natural heart shrinking from painful opposition, or the natural craving of the natural mind after this world, and its follies, and its applause. There is not a more dangerous temptation to the Christian than that of desiring to stand well with all men; to possess every man's countenance and approbation. Learn to meet dissatisfaction and contempt, cold looks and disapproving voices, when in the cause of your Lord, without discomfort or dismay; call to your aid His example, His power, His Spirit now, and, above all, strive to realize the day when that single sentence from His lips, "Who-soever shall confess me before men, him shall also the Son of man confess before the angels of God," will outweigh the crowns of princes, and outvalue all the treasures of the world.

The present are times when, both in public and in private, the true followers of our Lord must show their colours fearlessly and openly. "The enemy is coming in like a flood;" and whether it be in the senate or in society, in the pulpit or in the private intercourse of friends, a decided line must be taken, and the friends of God and of the world must no longer attempt to coalesce. "Who is on the Lord's side, who?" will again be the cry of His people, and none will be recognised now, none will be seen hereafter, who have not been content in the midst of an infidel, scoffing, ungodly generation, to take up the cross of Christ, to bear it openly amid the taunts of

enemies and the sneers of friends, to avow themselves its adherents and its advocates, and to be ready to give up station, character, property,—nay, if called upon, even life itself, in its defence.

That we may all know, experimentally, something of this feeling, and evidence it daily and hourly in our public and private conduct, may God of His mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

LECTURE XVIII.

Acts xxiii. 11.

AND THE NIGHT FOLLOWING, THE LORD STOOD BY HIM, AND SAID, BE OF GOOD CHEER, PAUL; FOR AS THOU HAST TESTIFIED OF ME IN JERUSALEM, SO MUST THOU BEAR WITNESS ALSO AT ROME.

St. Paul having been liberated from the hands of his infuriated persecutors, by the chief captain of the Roman garrison, as we are informed towards the close of the twenty-first chapter, was permitted by him to address, from the stairs of the castle of Antonia, the assembled multitude. He commenced immediately with that most interesting account of his miraculous conversion, upon which, in the early part of this history, we fully commented. He went over in detail all those striking particulars of the great light which shone from heaven upon his path, when journeying to Damascus on his errand of cruelty and persecution; of the divine voice, which cried unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" of the supernatural blindness which fell upon him, and his equally supernatural recovery; and, finally, of his entire devotedness to the service of that Saviour to whom he was then so bitterly opposed, but whom he now knew, and loved, and preached, and was content to die for.

All was mute silence throughout that vast assembly,

while the apostle dwelt upon these remarkable particulars; but no sooner did he declare that the same Saviour who had called him to the knowledge of Himself, had commissioned him to preach to the Gentiles, than the rage and madness of the people immediately burst forth. We read that "they gave him audience unto this word," but at that single word, which thus presumed to place the despised Gentile upon a level with the favoured Jew, "they lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live; and they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air." What a scene was this, how degrading to human nature, how corroborative of all that the Bible tells us of its depravity, and ignorance, and cruelty, and sin! A people who, when the Saviour revealed His offers of mercy in their streets, despised and rejected Him, persecuting Him even to the death, and yet at the very moment they heard that these self-same offers were now, for the first time, made to the Gentiles, thought death itself too light a punishment for the man who should presume so undistinguishingly to proclaim them. Such is human nature! There is nothing here peculiarly characteristic of the Jews, or of this remarkable period in their history; it is simply a public exposure of the naked depravity of the natural heart, which is for ever secretly at work with the same malignity and the same hostility to God, alike in all countries and at all times. Is there, for instance, nothing within our knowledge and observation at all upon a parallel with the exhibition of such feelings and such a disposition! Do we see nothing, even at the

present day, which bears a resemblance sufficiently near to this, to demonstrate the same corrupt origin? Alas! a palpable development of the same feelings, although veiled by the courtesies of civilized society, is by no means uncommon. How often do you find, in the self-righteous professors among yourselves, a feeling, almost of animosity, springing up within you at the thought of those who have gone more widely astray than you, having been brought to deeper feelings of vital religion than you have been, and finding that peace and acceptance, through the blood of Jesus, which you have never known! That you should, for so many years, have attended regularly and devoutly upon the ordinances of God, and feel nothing of an assured hope of salvation, of a sense of God's pardoning mercy, of a close and vital union, and, springing from this, a near and intimate communion with your Redeemer, while others, almost as widely separated from Him as the Gentiles of old, by their open sins, or long habits of carelessness and worldliness, should be permitted to hear and to receive, in all its peace-giving blessedness, the Gospel of the Saviour; this is, indeed, beyond your comprehension; this has, from the very days of which we speak, been a stumbling-block to thousands. Yet, brethren, this is simply the fulfilment of our Lord's own prediction to the Pharisees of His time, "The publicans and harlots shall enter into the kingdom of heaven before you;" that is, the most flagrant sinners shall find pardon and peace before you, who are content with "the form of godliness," without seeking to know and to receive its power. Thus, "many who are first shall be last, and the last shall be first;" many a poor, sin-

ning creature, who has denied the Lord who bought him, and has done despite to the Spirit of grace by his secret and open violation of God's will and his commandments, is brought in, at the sound of the Gospel trumpet, a weeping penitent, a broken-hearted, contrite believer, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, while many of the children of the kingdom, of those who appeared from early habits and education to be training for its heavenly courts, shall fall into the snares of the self-righteous and self-sufficient Pharisees, and shall at the last day be cast out; such, awful as it is, is our Lord's own declaration. Pray, brethren, that you may never yourselves mistake the form of godliness for its power: pray that you may learn to rejoice over every sinner that repenteth, over every individual who, through grace, receives the tidings of salvation, although he may have been heretofore most widely separated from God: pray that nothing may be so dear to you as the extension of your Lord's kingdom, even though you may be occasionally humbled, or rather excited to a holy jealousy, by the sight of others who were later in commencing the Christian race than yourselves, and yet are far outstripping you for the prize. Such things are daily occurring in every congregation; how many are there, for instance, even among ourselves, who gave great promise of a deep, heartfelt, saving interest in the things of God, and who have now "drawn back," we trust, not "unto perdition:" how many, on the other hand, who were once utterly ignorant of the things of God, and who are now seeking, earnestly seeking, a true and life-influencing knowledge of the

Gospel of our Lord as the one thing needful: and not a few who have really been called out of darkness into the marvellous light of God's word, and having received the Lord Jesus Christ in the love of Him, have no desire so near their hearts as to obey, and to honour, and to glorify Him in their life and conversation.

The chief captain of the Roman soldiery, perceiving that a most extraordinary tumult had arisen in the midst of the apostle's speech, and probably, from not understanding Hebrew, being unable at all to comprehend the motive of it, "commanded St. Paul to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know wherefore they cried so against him." In the midst of the boasted refinements of the Augustine age, how horrible a barbarity! to subject a prisoner to the punishment of military flogging, to extract, amidst the tortures of his body, the secret feelings of his mind. St. Paul, however, possessed, even under such dreadful circumstances, all that calmness and serenity of soul which the faith of the Christian, and the presence of the Christian's Lord, could alone impart. While they were tying him with thongs to the posts, at which this formidable punishment was usually inflicted, he meekly inquired of the centurion who was to preside over the execution of this merciless sentence, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" "Is it lawful?"—he does not say, "Is it merciful?" but simply, "Is it lawful?" If it be, I am content to bear it; the God whom I serve will support me under sufferings which are inflicted for His name's sake. But, if it were not lawful, St. Paul's religion directed

him, if possible, to avoid it: he never shrunk from a cross which his divine Master laid upon his onward road, he never stepped aside out of that road to take one up: a very different course from theirs who, in after ages, crowded the tribunals, and courted persecution and martyrdom, as if far more anxious to wear the martyr's crown in the courts of joy above, than to fulfil the martyr's duties, toiling and travelling upon earth.

When the centurion heard this inquiry of St. Paul, he felt at once that they had overstepped their legal authority, and were acting in direct opposition to the Sempronian law, which punished, "by the sentence of the people," any, however high their rank, who should presume to beat a Roman citizen. The chief captain, after interrogating the prisoner, and finding that he was not only a freeman of Rome, but a freeman by birth, and, therefore, even more honourable than he himself, who was a freeman only by purchase, ordered the punishment to be stopped, and the apostle's chains to be removed, and contented himself with detaining him within the castle until the Sanhedrim should be assembled on the morrow.

The following morning, accordingly, St. Paul was taken before this highest court of judicature which the Jews possessed, an assembly composed of seventy senators of the greatest consideration in the nation. Anxious at once to declare to them, as he had invariably done to all persons, and on all proper occasions, (2 Cor. i. 12,) the "testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had his conversation in the world," St. Paul commenced his ad-

dress in these words, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." The high priest Ananias, enraged at the confidence of an innocence which he could not gainsay, and of a calmness which the terrors of the assembled Sanhedrim could not ruffle, "commanded them that stood by to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten, contrary to the law?" This, my brethren, is again one of those incidents in the life of the apostle upon which the wise and good are divided. Was this speech of the apostle perfectly consistent with the meek and lowly spirit of Him whose name he bore? or was it an outbreking of his natural warmth of temper, which the Spirit of God had, indeed, deeply subdued, but not entirely eradicated? We believe that on this occasion it was in strict accordance with the Spirit of his divine Master; and the argument which appears sufficiently conclusive upon the propriety of the apostle's conduct, is this: Our Lord had made all such seasons of trial the subjects of a very peculiar and striking promise, when He said, "Whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost." Surely, then, this gracious Saviour would not have permitted St. Paul to have spoken at such a moment from the unsubdued dictates of the natural heart. We cannot, therefore, but consider that St. Paul "spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost," when he said to the corrupt and guilty Ananias, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall;" and if, as has been said, this high priest was shortly after-

wards cut off by a violent death, there is still more reason to believe that this was a solemn denunciation of the divine vengeance, dictated at the moment to this aggrieved and persecuted apostle by God himself.

Most embarrassing must now have been the situation of St. Paul, violently opposed by his open enemies, and in this instance condemned, as it would appear, by his real friends; for we read that "they that stood by," and it is supposed that this refers to the believing Jews who happened to be present, "said, Revilest thou God's High Priest?" "Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." Without entering at all into the learned disquisitions which have been written to prove that St. Paul really either did not know, or would not, upon principle, acknowledge, that Ananias was the high priest, it is sufficient to receive the apostle's words simply as he uttered them; he did not, at the moment, wist or consider that he was speaking to the ruler of the people; and if he had considered it, speaking, as we believe him to have spoken, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost, we imagine that, like Jeremiah of old, (Jer. xx. 9,) he would have possessed no power to decline giving utterance to the malediction with which God had charged him.

In the scene which ensued, we find St. Paul fulfilling, with remarkable success, that most valuable injunction of our blessed and guileless Redeemer, "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Upon looking round the assembly, or, as we are told, "earnestly beholding the council," St. Paul had perceived that this far-famed Sanhedrim was composed of men

possessing the most conflicting religious sentiments, violently opposed to each other, and agreed upon no one point, save that of persecuting, and, if possible, destroying the followers of the Lord. With such an assembly, the path of wisdom was obvious; and accordingly we are told, that perceiving "one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees," he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; of the hope and resurrection of the dead, I am called in question." This was in no degree deviating from the plain and simple truth; for the resurrection of the dead was one of the most offensive points of Christian doctrine to a Gentile hearer; and the chief accusation made afterwards against St. Paul was, that "one Jesus which was dead, St. Paul affirmed to be alive." But by thus stating this truth, he dexterously cast the torch of dissension among these intensely prepared and heated elements, and in a moment the whole assembly was in a blaze of personal animosity and theological war. "And there arose a great cry," continues the evangelist; "the scribes that were on the Pharisees' part arose and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God." The tumult increased as rapidly and as fearfully as we can well imagine with such minds and such hearts would inevitably be the case; and the Roman captain, seeing that nothing was to be gained from the deliberation of so incapable and impracticable an assembly, "took Paul by force from among them," and carried him into the castle.

After a day spent amid such remarkable troubles and anxieties, but out of all which the Lord had de-

livered him, the harassed and wearied prisoner retired to his bed of straw, to enjoy that peace which an approving God and an approving conscience can alone bestow. Many who lie upon a couch of down well may envy the repose which, under the worst of outward circumstances, is the lot of the righteous. But upon St. Paul, at such a time so environed by perils, so beset by dangers, his life hanging as it were upon a single thread, the events of the morrow wrapt in impenetrable mystery, the prospect darkened on every side by presages of wo, upon him his merciful Lord was not content to bestow common peace or common consolation. At midnight, therefore, the Lord, even our gracious Saviour and Redeemer himself, appeared to him as a comforting and encouraging friend. How considerate an act of heavenly mercy, how delightfully realizing the promise, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee." Yes, the Lord Jesus himself stood beside the prisoner's bed, and casting upon him that look of love, that look which had power of itself to call back the sinning Peter to a sense of his duty, said unto him, "Be of good cheer, Paul;" although in a prison, although surrounded by fierce, and bitter, and powerful enemies, "Be of good cheer, as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." What more could the suffering apostle need to console his heart, to invigorate his resolution? Here was at once an implied approval of all that he had hitherto done in his Master's service, a promise of future employments, and above all, a present sense of the soul-satisfying love of that Saviour who was dearer to him than a thousand worlds. Well was such a visit pur-

chased by such a day of anxiety and suffering. Surely no throne on earth was ever honoured like that prisoner's cell, no monarch upon earth was ever cheered and comforted like that prisoner's heart! We may lament, brethren, it is difficult not to lament, that such manifestations are no longer granted, that in our troubles and difficulties we have no such encouraging presence of "Him whom having not seen we love;" and yet how much more cause have we rather to rejoice than to repine. "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world:" that blessed promise is for us and for our children, a promise which never has been, and never shall be, broken to any of the believing followers of our Lord, while time remains. And such a promise of spiritual aid and spiritual presence far outweighs in value any promise of a personal presence which our Lord could have vouchsafed.

Do I, then, at the present moment address any of the real children of God? To you, my Christian brethren, there is no need that I should endeavour to demonstrate the truth, or dilate on the fulfilment of these gracious words. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself;" you have the witness to the fulfilment of this most blessed promise of our Lord "in yourself;" in your own mind, in your own heart, above all, in your own experience. Let the man who would overthrow your faith with argument, reason with you that the fulfilment of such a promise is impossible; let the man who would destroy your faith with ridicule, assure you that the very expectation of its fulfilment is superstition; let the great tempter of your soul suggest to you that it is all delusion, the offspring of

a heated imagination, or a weakened mind; you will answer him at once, "Get thee behind me, Satan," I have the witness in myself, a testimony which no argument can gainsay, no ridicule invalidate, no temptation destroy. I have been in affliction and sorrow, when the consolations of earthly friends were utterly ineffectual to dry the starting tear or to calm the bursting heart, and at that hour there was one who said, "In all your affliction, I am afflicted, and the angel of whose presence" comforted me. Who, while I wept for those who were taken from me, said, "Weep not," they are not dead but sleeping, and those "who sleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him." I have been in seasons of the most fearful spiritual temptation, when I had almost made shipwreck of my hope, and if left to myself should have for ever ruined my immortal soul, but there was one who "with the temptation made a way of escape," who opened up that way to my bewildered heart, who by distinctly and perceptibly influencing my mind, my judgment, my affections, my will, guided me into a path of safety, and the snare was broken and I was delivered. I have been upon a sick, and, as I believed, a dying bed: I have stood upon the brink of a fathomless eternity, and I have looked, fearfully looked, down upon that place of torment, whither my own sins and iniquities would long since have hurried me, and at that awful hour there was one who stood by me in the watches of the night, and whispered strong consolation: there was one who said, "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" I have drawn the sting of death, and robbed the grave of its victory: "Be of good cheer," for I am with you always, and

will not desert you amid the swellings of Jordan; my right hand shall sustain you until you have passed the flood, and have landed in safety in "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And are there those who would tell the believer that this is a delusion? that imagination dried *this* mourner's tears, and delivered the tempted out of temptation, and made a bed of pain a bed of *peace*? Tell the starving man that imagination can feed him, tell the drowning man that it can rescue him, the dying man that it can heal him, but O, think not to tell the child of God that he could mistake the felt presence, the abiding, comforting, supporting presence of his Lord, for any thing that imagination could invent, or earth or hell could feign. No! you cannot thus deceive the Christian. He has the witness in himself; and if there be a confidence against which neither Satan's snares, nor Satan's power shall prevail, it is this, that the spiritual presence of his Lord shall be continued to him through good and ill, through health and sickness, through life and death, until it shall be exchanged for His *personal* presence in the kingdom of His glory.

LECTURE XIX.

Acts xxiv. 25.

AND AS HE REASONED OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, TEMPERANCE, AND JUDGMENT TO COME, FELIX TREMBLED, AND ANSWERED, GO THY WAY FOR THIS TIME; WHEN I HAVE A CONVENIENT SEASON, I WILL CALL FOR THEE.

WE resume the history of St. Paul at the close of the twenty-third chapter, where we find that the Jews, having bound themselves together in a confederacy for the destruction of the apostle, it pleased God by His providence to detect and overthrow it. Instead, therefore, of falling a victim to the malignant determination of a blood-thirsty mob, the apostle was at least to enjoy the semblance of a fair and equitable trial before the Roman governor Felix. For this purpose, having been kept in Herod's judgment hall until his accusers, the chief priests and elders, and their counsel Tertullus, had arrived, on a set day the apostle is brought before the judgment-seat, and the venal orator to whom his destruction had been committed, thus began: "Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness." We need not comment upon the high-

flown flattery of such an exordium, when addressed to a man whom both Josephus and Tacitus unite in stigmatizing as a monster of cruelty and injustice; it is, alas! no new thing to hear language addressed by flatterers to men of power while living, which the most abject of historians would scorn to apply to them when dead; but this is the common lot of earthly greatness, never to hear the truth, until truth itself comes too late to profit. This "most noble Felix," who was a murderer, and an adulterer, probably never even for a moment imagined the colours in which his own character should descend to posterity; never conceived the idea, that he who was thus daily and elaborately lauded by his surrounding parasites, should, when a few short years had passed, be dismissed by the faithful historian with this single remark: "Felix exercised the royal authority with the spirit of a slave, and indulged himself in every species of cruelty and lust." (Tac. v. 9.) O, for one man in the chambers of princes, to speak the truth, the truth of God, the truth as it is in Jesus, in their ears and to their hearts! It is vain to expect it from those who themselves neither feel its reality nor know its unutterable value; it was vain, therefore, to hope for it from Tertullus. Without farther commentary upon his oratory, then, we will pass at once to the charge which the most corrupt of pleaders brought against the most virtuous of prisoners. "We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who hath also gone about to profane the Temple." The specific charges, therefore, against St. Paul were these: *First*, that he was a rebel against

the Roman government, a mover of sedition: *secondly*, that he had been guilty of profaning the Temple: and, *thirdly*, that he was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, in fact, a Christian. The two former of these charges the apostle distinctly denies and disproves; to the latter he honestly and openly pleads guilty. "This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." This was, indeed, as his Master before him had done, "witnessing a good confession." He is not ashamed of the Lord Jesus, even while standing at the tribunal of his enemies: he did not deny his religion, even when branded with the name of heresy.

"This I confess unto thee,"—this, which is the real cause of the hatred of my enemies, and the animosity with which I am persecuted—this, their heaviest charge, and their most dangerous accusation, I freely confess. My brethren, learn a lesson, I beseech you, from this part of the conduct of the apostle. There are many, probably very many, among you, who are far more deeply influenced by the great truths of the religion of your Lord, than those around you: are you equally willing to confess your sense of the value of these things? When accused of being more earnest in the things of God than your neighbours, what is your reply? Do you shrink from the accusation, as if piety were a crime? How many are there of men of the world, who would rather be considered guilty of any weakness, I had almost said of any wickedness, than of an earnest fervent feeling of love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and of devotedness to His service? They associate the charge with a

certain degree of mental imbecility, and they fear that if they plead guilty to it, they shall effectually lose their station amidst the powerful intellects of the day, and cease to be regarded as among the intelligent, the wise, the judicious in their generation. Of all such we can only say, as our Lord has already said, "They love the praise of men more than the praise of God." They are ashamed of Christ in the midst of a sinful and adulterous generation: can they imagine that He will confess them when He cometh in His glory, and before the angels of God? If there be, on the contrary, a sight pleasing to the God of our salvation, a sight which the very angels bend from their starry spheres to look into, and which rejoices their pure and perfect hearts more than heaven's own music, it is to behold a devoted follower of their Lord here upon earth stand boldly forward and acknowledge that he is guilty, if it be a crime, of loving the Lord, who died for him, with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; that he will not in silence, under any circumstances or in any society, see His word despised, or hear His name profaned; and that he will rather risk a world's ridicule, or a world's hatred, than one frown from that gracious Being whose love is better than life.

St. Paul having sufficiently cleared himself from the charges of sedition and profaning the Temple, appears to have suffered nothing by the boldness with which he had pleaded guilty to the charge of what they called heresy. Perhaps at a heathen tribunal, where Judaism and Christianity were alike despised, there was little disposition to give the former a triumph by the persecution of the latter, and thus the

very ignorance of the judge was over-ruled by God to the protection of the prisoner. In continuing the narrative, we are informed that "when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way," that is, having now, since Paul had spoken upon the subject, more knowledge of "that way," as they contemptuously styled the religion of Jesus, than he had previously possessed, he perceived that the prisoner had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds, and, therefore, postponed the farther hearing of the case, until the chief captain, who had rescued St. Paul from the hands of the Jews, should arrive to give his version of the act which Turtullus had so grossly misrepresented.

"And after certain days, when Felix came" back to Cesarea "with his wife Drusilla," whom he had probably brought from some distant place, "he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." To enter fully into the circumstances which follow, we must bear in mind that Felix was a Gentile, but Drusilla was a Jewess, the daughter of that Herod who was struck suddenly dead by the righteous judgment of God. Hers was a singular lot: she had been betrothed to Epiphanes, son of Antiochus, king of Comagene; she had been married to Azizus, king of the Emesenes, and having deserted him, she was now living in open adultery with Felix. That such persons should desire to see St. Paul in private, and to hear him "concerning the faith in Christ," appears most remarkable, and would, indeed, be perfectly unintelligible, were it not for the existence of a feeling in the human mind which, amidst all the indulgence of luxury and all the softnesses of dissipation,

will sometimes excite a wish for something more durable and more satisfactory; and although its possessor is prepared to renounce nothing, to improve nothing, to alter nothing, he is yet sometimes found to place himself willingly within the sound of the Gospel, either in the hope of finding an anodyne for the gnawings of conscience, or a temporary excitement under the insupportable dulness of a life, miscalled a life of pleasure. Whatever may have been the motive, such was the character of the persons who now placed themselves, freely and voluntarily, under the temporary teaching of St. Paul, and most wisely did he improve the precious opportunity. They desired to hear of "the faith in Christ," probably hoping that he would confine himself to the life and doctrines of the Crucified. That he spake of Jesus, that he dwelt long, and powerfully, and sweetly upon that, to Him, endearing theme, upon His atoning death, His pardoning love, His everliving intercession, no one who knows the character of the apostle's preaching will presume to question; but that he contented himself with doing so, without attempting to apply, these truths to the conscience and the heart, no one who has ever read an epistle of St. Paul will for a moment imagine. We can readily conceive the half attentive, half listless manner in which that guilty couple sat and heard of a Saviour whom they scorned, and a superstition which they despised; we can picture to ourselves the supercilious indifference of Drusilla, who, brought up in the Jewish ceremonial, had built her confidence in the proud and vain presumption that she was a daughter of Abraham, and as such should unfailingly sit down with him at last in his Father's kingdom. We

can almost see the depraved and cruel Felix, wrapt in that species of security which the tyrant feels from his own unquestioned and unquestionable authority, self-complacent that he was permitting so vile and low a thing as "Paul the prisoner" to speak thus freely of his despised creed and of his crucified Master, and feeling perfectly assured that no word would be uttered by that prisoner which could disturb the quiet or alarm the conscience of his judge. But in desiring St. Paul to preach to them, they had sought no common teacher, no every day declaimer upon doctrines which he did not feel, no time-serving waiter upon royalty, who would condescend to secure his own safety and his own liberty by speaking "smooth things" to one who had "power to crucify him and power to release him." St. Paul, therefore, for he was not one of those, if such there be, who preach "faith without works," having laid the foundation of holiness deep in the rock of ages, proceeds to the practical results of the Gospel which he taught; and as he never drew his bow at a venture, he, with consummate skill, barbed the arrow for the hearts at which he pointed it. He was speaking to Felix, whose life was as full of injustice and cruelty towards man, as of impiety to God, who had indeed lately caused Jonathan the high priest to be put to death for merely reminding him of his duty, and, therefore, to the unjust judge the apostle boldly reasoned "of *righteousness*:" he was addressing Drusilla, the open and avowed adulteress, and therefore to the titled prostitute he reasoned "of *temperance*," (or literally "of *continency*:") he was standing before judges from whom he could expect neither favour

nor justice, and he carried his cause up to a higher tribunal, and spake—how awfully and how fearfully to such an audience—“of judgment to come.” That, indeed, must have been the sting of his discourse, the “judgment to come”—that tribunal at which the present scene would be reversed, where they who now sat aloft in regal state would be the trembling and the hopeless criminals, and where He, for whom the apostle now was pleading, would be the inexorable Judge: where the present assembly would assuredly meet again, and not in the recesses of a palace from which there was no tongue to tell the world the guilty history of its inmates, but where all that they had done in secret should be proclaimed before assembled worlds; where they who had been hurried into eternity by the dagger of the assassin, or the slower operation of the empty forms of justice, for both of which Felix was sufficiently notorious, should again crowd the judgment-seat, but then, to plead against the unjust judge, and not to suffer from his cruelty; where Drusilla’s injured husband would again stand side by side with her, as they had stood side by side before the altar of God, but now to testify to her broken vows and after-life of infamy. Conceive such a subject, handled by such a preacher, and set home to the hearts of such an audience! Doubtless would they most gladly have stopped the daring preacher; most willingly would they have arrested the career of truth; but the very act would have too plainly demonstrated to every stander by, *whose* hearts were wrung, whose souls were writhing beneath conviction, from which there was no escape. Long, therefore, did they bear in silent torture the

infliction they had courted, till at length, the outward frame gave evidence, too plain to be denied, and too powerful to be concealed, of all that passed within. In the short but emphatic language of God's own word, "Felix trembled!" he quailed beneath the eye, he shrunk from the voice of his prisoner, every limb shook with uncontrollable emotion. All further forbearance was useless, and he therefore hastily cut short the apostle's speech, and ordered him back to his prison-house, hoping to save appearances with others, or to pacify his own conscience by the affected gentleness of the dismissal, and by the false and hollow promise with which he accompanied it, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

We are sometimes led to wonder, while reading this striking and improving incident, whence came it that of these two equally guilty persons, the man, hardened in crime, inured to deeds of blood, and more fitted by nature to endure without emotion the powerful appeal of the apostle, should writhe beneath his preaching, until the very spectators could mark his pallid countenance and his quaking limbs, while she, the guilty partner of his crimes, could hear all calmly, all unmoved, these bitter and heart-searching truths! The cause of the difference was this, my brethren: Drusilla, the Jewess, had something, however frail and false, in which to seek a refuge; she trusted to the empty form of the religion to which she belonged, and, built up in her self-righteousness, defied the denunciations, even of God Himself; Felix the profligate, without a refuge, either real or imaginary, to which his soul could fly, was more open to conviction,

his heart was more exposed to the arrows of divine truth, and for a little moment there appeared in his case a faint glimmering of hope that he might yet be brought to penitence and to God.

Of all the fearful objects upon which the eye of God's ministers can glance, the most fearful, the most affecting, is this; to see you, with the light of the Gospel shining upon your path, and its truths, its blessed truths, partially, at least, received and understood, and yet your lives demonstrating that you are walking in the broad road which will lead you to destruction: when we speak "of righteousness," to feel that there may be some among you, even with all the lip-service of a nominal religion, continuing to act dishonestly, deceitfully, unjustly to your fellow-men: that there may be many among you trusting to your own poor, miserable attempts at righteousness, and, like the Jews of old, "going about to establish your own righteousness, and not submitting yourselves to the righteousness of God," not desiring to be clothed with the spotless and perfect righteousness of your Redeemer: when we speak of "temperance," fearing that even here, and amidst God's professing people, there may be the secret follower of licentiousness, those who indulge in practices which will not bear the light—the open profligate—the concealed drunkard—the professor of a self-denying religion, and yet, whose morality is the very scorn of the world, and who hopes by a few specious charities or external religious duties, to gloss over deeds which, if revealed, would make life itself a burden and a curse to him. Do we speak to any such at the present moment? Let God and your own conscience determine:

but this we know, that if we do, you are less likely to tremble at the warning, less likely to retire to your chambers to weep and pray for pardon and acceptance, than those who never yet have heard of God's immutable justice, or of a Saviour's love; for that Saviour himself has said, "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you," . . . for "ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe." (Matt. xxii. 32.) You are, in fact, "Gospel hardened:" and while others, not less guilty, will, like Felix, "tremble" at the thought of a "judgment to come," you, like Drusilla, will listen to all that has been said, uninfluenced and unmoved, and retire, like Drusilla, to continue a life of unholiness with the empty profession of sanctity: the truths of the Gospel in your heads and on your tongues, and a devil of intemperance, or incontinency, or worldliness, within your hearts.

But while we speak thus plainly, as the word of God commands us to speak, of that most fearful of all characters, the ungodly professor of religion, let not the open sinner triumph in the thought, I make no professions of religion, I have my little follies and my weaknesses, like other men, but I do not strive to conceal them beneath the mask of outward sanctity. So far it is well; you, then, possess no baseless city of refuge, built of the fragments of the sanctuary, which on the last great day shall fall, and grind you to powder. You are not like Drusilla; but would you now contentedly change places with her guilty paramour? Would you wish yourself with Felix? Believe me, there is little, there is nothing, to choose between a

hollow acceptance of the truths of revelation, and a total rejection of them:—both are equally ruinous, equally fatal. Religion, it cannot be too often repeated, religion must be every thing, or it is nothing. It is no difficult matter to determine which it is with you. Perhaps you have never advanced upon the right road even as far as Felix, you have never even trembled at God's word:

“ Yours is but half the demon's lot,
For you believe, and tremble not ? ”

You have heard, unmoved, the most awful denunciations against sin, and the most heart-subduing offers of a Saviour's love. We will not say that you have avowedly and openly rejected them; we will not say that you have turned scornfully away from truths of which, in your better moments, you acknowledge the reality and power; but then neither did he, of whom we have spoken, act thus in open defiance of the God who made him; no! that is the lot of few; there are few who have the hardihood to say with them of old, “unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;” few who thus boldly unfurl the banners of rebellion, and stand in arms against their king. But many, alas! how many, who, like Felix, silence every compunctious visiting of conscience, and postpone every serious thought and feeling until some future, some indefinite period, some tomorrow which will never come. Now this is the way, brethren, that you, to whom I am more particularly addressing myself, have continually acted. You have heard the words of the preacher; you know that they are true; others who have never heard them may scoff at all religion, you cannot; if you attempt it, the

secret misgiving at your heart contradicts the sneer upon your countenance; you wish you could believe it a delusion: would to God that "the judgment to come" were only a cunningly devised fable, that heaven and hell were the invention of the preacher; but all will not do, you believe in their existence now, you shall not doubt it throughout eternity. Then what remains to enable you to pacify your conscience, and yet to continue the life you lead at present? There is but one way to which Satan invariably prompts you: it is, to postpone, to procrastinate, to say, if not to the preacher, at least to the preacher's truths, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Do not harass me at present, go thy way only for this time, but do not return unbidden, I will assuredly call for thee ere long. And do you really intend ever again to call for truths which you now so unceremoniously dismiss? Yes, I firmly believe you do; I firmly believe that the most careless, thoughtless, irreligious person I now address, does most decidedly intend to call for truths which, although he is well contented to live without, he, even he, would shrink from the thought of dying without. But when will you call for them? when will repentance be a more palatable subject, and "righteousness and temperance" more easy duties, and the "judgment to come" a more agreeable topic than at the present moment? You are looking to future years, to days of sickness, to a bed of death, as your "convenient season." Did you ever visit a sick chamber? did you ever stand by a bed of death? O, if you had, you would not dare to cherish the delusion, that that was a "convenient season" for turning the heart to God, for receiving

the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, for preparing for the future judgment. So great a work to be crowded into so small a space! a work which demands every thought of the mind, every feeling of the soul, to be in full and vigorous activity, and you hope to perform it in the few, sad, painful and drowsy, or delirious hours, of mortal sickness! My brethren, may God of His mercy deliver you from so great a delusion! for never did the father of lies cheat a poor soul of its eternity by a more barefaced, palpable, and shallow falsehood, than that with which he is now attempting to satisfy your hearts.

But there are some among you, who do more than not merely disbelieve the truths you hear from time to time; you have really trembled at them; your convictions of sin have been strong and powerful, but there they have stopped. There have been hours when you would have given worlds to be among the people of God, but these have soon passed away, and your habits, your acquaintances,—yes, there is the great and appalling difficulty,—your acquaintances care not for these things, and you like not to differ from all around you; you imagine that if you are once in earnest in the things of eternity, you must commence by renouncing your friends, and this induces you still to procrastinate: you will say, the “convenient season” to which I look, is by no means so distant, so uncertain a matter: there are some little circumstances in my present lot which will speedily be altered; when such a difficulty is overcome, when such an arrangement is made, when such a relationship is entered into, when such an event, to which I now look forward, has taken place, then it is my full determination to seek in earnest the

things belonging to my peace, to give up all unholy practices, and really to devote myself to the service of God. It is, perhaps, in vain to tell you, that this is as complete, though not as undisguised a fallacy, as that which we have just exposed. It is vain to tell you that change of circumstances brings with it no change of heart; that if you persist in indifference now, you will be equally indifferent then. I say it is vain to tell you this, because you will probably refuse to learn by any experience but your own; but this, as a minister of Christ, I am bound to tell you, "whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear," that every offer of salvation, every promise of grace, every assurance of acceptance, with which we are commissioned by our Lord, from Genesis to Revelation, is limited to the present day, the present hour, the present moment. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." To-day, grace is yours, Christ is yours, heaven is yours; to-morrow, even though willing to seek them, not one may be within your reach; though desirous to pray for them, the Spirit of prayer may have for ever fled, while the only answer to your petitions may be that solemn denial which the word of God has recorded for such hours as these: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh."—"Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

This I am bound to tell you, and I am equally bound to demonstrate to you its truth by the very example before you. For two whole years St. Paul was within the reach of Felix. And was there no "convenient season?" Far from it; "convenient seasons" were continually recurring: we are expressly told, as if to impress the very truth of what I speak, that Felix often, very often, "sent for Paul, and communed with him;" but the time was passed, the day of grace was over, the favourable moment when the heart was softened and the body trembled, and the "soul melted like wax at the presence of the Lord," had fled, never to return. No impression, that we are told of, ever again was made, no conviction of sin ever again set home upon his conscience; he heard, indeed, repeatedly; but all that we know of him is, that he was sent in chains to Rome very shortly after his prisoner, and with difficulty escaped an ignominious death. In him, therefore, was fulfilled that seven times quoted prophecy of Isaiah, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." Brethren, we would leave the application with yourselves, and would only pray that we may be enabled to add, concerning every individual among you, as our divine Master added, when He quoted the passage to his hearers, "But blessed are *your* eyes, for they see, and *your* ears, for they hear."

LECTURE XX.

Acts xxvi. 28.

THEN AGRIPPA SAID UNTO PAUL, ALMOST THOU
PERSUADEST ME TO BE A CHRISTIAN.

AFTER that most interesting incident which occurred to the apostle, whose life we are reviewing, and which formed the subject of our last remarks, we find that for two whole years he remained a prisoner at Cæsarea. It is as needless to comment upon the iniquity of the judge who thus detained a prisoner of whose innocence he was convinced, as it is to speak of his corruption, when we find that he sent for his prisoner the oftener only for the purpose of affording him the better opportunity of offering a bribe for his escape. We cannot, however, help feeling some little surprise that when Felix left his government, which he did at the end of the two years, he should not have availed himself of so favourable an opportunity for performing an act of cheap and easy virtue, by liberating his prisoner. But this is explained by the evangelist, when he tells us, "Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." The whole course of Felix's administration had been a course of corruption and cruelty; he dreaded, very naturally, the indignation of those whom he had governed, and therefore to court their good opinion, he committed an act of positive injustice against his innocent prisoner. It is as-

tonishing how continually the love and the fear of the world are producing similar effects; and how invariably one dereliction of duty draws others after it in its train. We feel, perhaps, that we have acted wrongly or inconsistently, and we are then compelled to act still more wrongly, and still more inconsistently, to shield us from the effects of our former transgressions. Thus, when the sinner is not brought to cast himself wholly and unreservedly upon the pardoning love of his Redeemer, with a broken and a contrite heart, he usually proceeds from one enormity to another, until he find no room for acceptance, "no place for repentance," though, like Esau, "he seek it diligently and with tears." Instead, therefore, of our feeling any surprise that to show the Jews a favour, Felix left Paul bound, we are rather tempted to wonder that, to show them a still greater favour, he did not order Paul for execution; but here the providence of God interfered; God had said to Felix, as He said once before to Satan, "Behold, he is in thine hand, but save his life:" the lion can only go to the length of his chain, and thanks be to God, that chain is held by One, who, although He is almighty to destroy, is yet "almightiest to redeem."

In Cesarea, then, St. Paul was left when Felix departed. This city has already been remarkable in the history we are considering. It was here that Agabus foretold, in the presence of Paul's weeping companions, the fate of him with whose girdle he had bound himself; it was here that the Christian residents had so earnestly "besought him not to go up to Jerusalem," to the bonds and afflictions which awaited him; it was to the disciples of Cesarea that he

made that most affecting declaration, "What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus;" and it was of these same converts, who so well redeemed their Christian character by their submission to the will of God in his behalf, that we are told, "When he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done." How remarkable a proof of the shortsightedness of human speculations may be drawn from this single incident! These weeping disciples thought that nothing so calamitous could have befallen their beloved teacher or themselves, as St. Paul's determination, in the face of all warnings, to forsake Cesarea, and to proceed to Jerusalem. Yet did this event, which they imagined of all others the most fatal to their hope of ever seeing the beloved apostle again in Cesarea, when overruled by God's providence, ensure his residence in that very city for two whole years, a longer period than he would, in all probability, ever voluntarily have thought of. It was, therefore, with the Christians of Cesarea, as it had been with Jacob of old, as it is continually with ourselves; at the moment we are saying, "All these things are against me," our heavenly Father, by the wonderful appointments of His love, and the inscrutable workings of His providence, is bringing light out of darkness, and good out of evil, directing and harmonizing what appears to us the most cross and discordant circumstances, until we are, with shame for our blindness, and penitence for our faithlessness, compelled to confess that had the whole arrangement been intrusted to our own management or our own sagacity, we

could not have achieved a more prosperous result. For two years, then, did St. Paul, although a prisoner, prosecute his ministry at Cesarea, until Felix, the unjust judge, was superseded by Portius Festus, another Roman governor, as ignorant as Felix of all those circumstances which could alone enable him rightly to decide upon the apostle's case, but apparently more equitable in his official capacity, and more respectable in his private conduct.

Soon after Festus had arrived at his sovereignty, he received a visit from two persons of considerable rank and importance, Agrippa and Bernice. They were the brother and sister of Drusilla, and the children of that Herod who was punished with death by the just judgment of an offended God. These persons having expressed a great desire to hear the remarkable prisoner, now in the custody of Festus, orders were given that every thing should be prepared for the public examination of St. Paul. Accordingly, says the inspired writer, "on the morrow when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, Paul was brought forth," and after Festus had opened the proceedings, the apostle was permitted to speak for himself. St. Paul commenced, on this important occasion, by giving an account of his early life, his rigid Pharisaical habits, his extreme antipathy to the name and people of Christ, all deeply interesting facts to a man possessing such a perfect knowledge of Judaism as Agrippa. From these, he passed on to his unrelenting persecution of Christians, and then to the account of his own wonderful and miraculous conversion to the faith of that Saviour, of whose followers

he was, at the very moment of this conversion, in full and blood-thirsty pursuit. He next dwelt upon his own reception of the great truths of Christianity, and the astonishing fact that he, Paul the persecutor, had “showed first unto them of Damascus and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” And he concluded by saying, “Having, therefore, obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and unto the Gentiles.” It is remarkable that in an audience of so hostile a character, the apostle should have been permitted to speak thus plainly and thus at length, without any interruption; perhaps it may be accounted for by the fact, that he had touched upon no point affecting the consciences of his hearers: had he begun by reasoning upon “righteousness and temperance, and judgment to come,” he would probably have found Agrippa and Bernice quite as impatient and intractable as Felix and Drusilla; but he commenced with the historical and doctrinal portion of his subject, and was not interrupted until now, that he was, in all probability, about to apply what had been said to the hearts of his hearers. For we read, that “As he thus spake for himself,”—before, therefore, he had brought his address to a conclusion,—Festus, who, no doubt, had sat in mute astonishment at the declaration of truths which to him must have been completely unintelligible, could no longer keep silence; he heard the apostle assert that

the crucified Nazarene, of whose fate Festus was probably not entirely ignorant, had risen from the dead, and that this was the incredible fact for which he was hazarding his life, and to make one proselyte to which he was compassing sea and land, and sacrificing comfort, character, reputation, all that men most closely cling to, without even the shadow of a recompense or reward. At such a statement Festus could no longer contain himself, but burst forth before the whole assembly with a declaration which, I doubt not, spake the honest conviction of his heart, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." How extremely natural a result for such a mind to arrive at! To behold a man, evidently capable of great things, an educated man, a well-connected man, a talented man, and more than all in the eyes of Festus, a Roman citizen, to behold this man, at one time voluntarily traversing the earth, from city to city, and from country to country, at another, dragged from prison to prison, and all for what purpose, for what advantages? To declare a fact which Festus imagined that no one in his senses could believe, and to induce others to give up every pre-conceived opinion, and to agree with him in honouring and obeying this dead, but as he asserted, risen and living malefactor. If this were not insanity, Festus was acquainted with no principle sufficiently powerful to induce such a result. And is not this, brethren, precisely the judgment which the world, whether the Gentile or the nominally Christian world, passes, secretly, upon every man in every age, who really and conscientiously follows the apostle's example? I do not mean that it will actually go the length of

asserting that he is mad; this, at the present day, is usually reserved for those whose eccentricities or absurdities fully entitle them to the appellation; but is there not always in the mind of worldly men, when judging of the conduct of the true and consistent followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, a certain indefinite suspicion that all is not right with them, that if they really are not hypocrites, a very difficult fact to establish in the minds of their enemies, they are certainly of very weak and questionable judgment; and while the ungodly portion of the world may exercise too much courtesy to say, "Thou art beside thyself," it fully believes, and does not hesitate to insinuate, that the mind, so deeply interested in the things of God, as to prefer eternity to time, the promise of the future to the enjoyment of the present, has lost its balance, and should be no guide to them in seeking the way of everlasting life. The answer of St. Paul was alone sufficient to have convinced his judge of the falsehood of his assertion: "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and soberness. For the king,"—Agrippa, although not a Jew, having been strictly educated in the Jewish religion—"knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner." How triumphant a reply! I am speaking of facts perfectly notorious; if they be false, let the king himself contradict me, but if true, how can he controvert the deductions which I draw from them? Happy is it for the Christian that the same truths must be at all times equally sure and incontrovertible; "this thing was not done in a corner!" We

preach a Saviour who was crucified before the assembled thousands of Israel, who arose from the dead, and was seen by five hundred witnesses at once. What fact in history shall be believed, if this be doubted? St. Paul continues applying himself now more closely to Agrippa's conscience, as he felt that his understanding was convinced: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" believest thou those gifted men who declared that Christ must needs "have suffered these things to enter into His glory?" "I know that thou believest," and therefore I know that I have that hold upon thy conscience in declaring these undeniable truths, which I must in vain hope for while addressing Festus. "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian?" How remarkable, how astonishing a confession from a king upon his throne to the prisoner at his bar; these truths are so unquestionable that I cannot resist them; would to God that I had, even now, sufficient resolution to exchange my sceptre for the cross, and to follow the Saviour whom Paul preaches.

As in the last lecture, we found it profitable to remark the probable cause of the widely differing effects which the same truths possessed upon Felix and Drusilla, so will it now not be uninteresting to trace the same with regard to Festus and Agrippa. We believe, then, that it may be found, speaking after the fashion of men, to have been occasioned by the fact that Agrippa was thoroughly versed in those scriptures of truth, of which Festus was entirely ignorant. The consequence was, that the very same declarations which were pronounced by the uninformed Festus to be a sufficient proof of the apostle's

insanity, were, in the mind of Agrippa, so convincing, so unanswerable, so deeply influential, that they "almost persuaded him to be a Christian." It is important, most important, to mark this distinction; for it establishes, beyond all question, the superiority of those who are instructed in the great truths of the Gospel, over those who are in ignorance of them, even where both are alike unconverted to the Lord of the Gospel, uninfluenced by the truths which they have received. As a proof of this, observe one of the strongest instances in which it can occur; we are, as ministers of Christ, sent for to attend the last hours of some poor sinner who has sadly and fearfully neglected, while in health, the things belonging to his peace: we address him upon those vital truths in which, at such an hour, without circumlocution or delay, we would urge him to seek a refuge. Alas! he is as ignorant as Festus of every subject upon which we touch; almost of the terms in which the Bible states them: this is not the hour for explanations or definitions, and before even a partial view can be given him of the great scheme of man's redemption, of the extremity of his need, and of the all-sufficiency of the abundant supply treasured up for him in a Saviour's atoning death and proffered love, the faculties have become still more obtuse, the mind more darkened and confused, and the dying sinner has sunk beyond the sound of human teaching, or the reach of human consolation. Now take the case of one, who, like Agrippa, knows the truth, although he knows it to no hallowed and no saving purpose: behold the minister of Christ at the side of such a sufferer; awful, indescribably awful is his case, but yet, not hopeless.

The truths forgotten and neglected in the days of health are still treasured up in the memory; a word, a hint, a prayer, blessed by the fostering grace of our God, may call them, as it were, into a new existence; may remind the sinner of all he once has known, may send him to the Saviour of whose power he never doubted, may lead him to that God, that (see 2 Cor. v. 20) tenderly beseeching God, the way to whom, although he had never trodden, he had never forgotten; and before the man of God has departed, he has seen, in such a case, the icy fountain of that sinner's heart thawed by the rays from the Son of Righteousness, the tear of penitence gush from his eyes, and the deep and pleading prayer comes struggling from his lips; the barrier of indifference for ever broken down, and that hardened but not ignorant unbeliever lying at the foot of the cross. Upon you, then, my brethren, to whom, whether as parents or instructors, the guardianship of youth is intrusted, I could desire particularly to impress what has now been said, for your encouragement and guidance. You cannot, it is true, convert the heart, but you may largely supply the mind and the memory, with scriptural truth, and you may thus be sowing seed which shall produce fruit to the glory of God, long after your heads are laid in the dust, and every other acquirement which you have imparted, shall have passed into merited oblivion.

The reply of the apostle to the declaration of Agrippa, is most affecting and most striking: "Then Paul answered and said, I would to God that not only thou, but also all who hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these

bonds." The greatest earnestness of zeal united to the highest delicacy of feeling. He would that his oppressors enjoyed the privileges, but not the penalties of the Gospel.

That Agrippa should have advanced no farther, that he should have continued the life of immorality in which he was engaged, and have died the "almost Christian" which he lived, is sufficient evidence that human eloquence, and human reasoning, and human feeling, can do nothing, except as instrumentally, to convert one sinner's soul; "not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Trusting then, simply and entirely, to the aid of that divine Spirit, I would now, in conclusion, apply myself to those among you, who are at this hour, in the sight of God, what Agrippa was, at the moment when he made the avowal of the text. For have we no "almost Christians" even in a Christian congregation? Alas! is not this rather the peculiar danger and sin of our times? There are few, very few of the church-going portion of our community, who would for a moment think of contradicting any of the great truths of our holy religion; yet how many are there, of whom, while we may truly say, as St. Paul said of Agrippa, we know that they believe, historically, notionally believe, we do not know, we cannot even in Christian charity profess to hope, that they are fully persuaded to be Christians, to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their all-sufficient and only Saviour, to be justified, sanctified, governed by Him, to desire to live the life of faith on earth, that through His atoning merits they may live the life of glory in heaven.

Brethren, there is no class of persons for whom a Christian minister feels more deeply than for those among yourselves, who deserve the appellation of "almost Christians." The reason is obvious; he can well enter into all your feelings, all your difficulties; he once stood where you are standing. Yes! we scruple not to avow that there was a time when we had the same earnest desire to receive the whole truth as it is in Jesus, which many of you, now present, experience, and when we were deterred from it by the same feelings of natural unwillingness and distrust. The fear of the world's ridicule and the world's frown is a most powerful auxiliary to Satan in all our bosoms, and is often for a long period successful in keeping us away from God, and, therefore, with many of us at least, loud must be God's warning voice, and heavy upon us God's afflicting hand, before we will come out and be separate, and identify ourselves with the little company who are walking on the straight and narrow road, and seeking for the heavenly inheritance. Let me, then, earnestly entreat you, my beloved brethren, more especially my younger brethren, to look at this subject, as you will soon desire to have looked at it. The question is not, what portion of this world's advantages, or pleasures, or follies, can you indulge in, and yet secure a blissful eternity. There are no "almost Christians" in heaven; you may waver upon the edge of the line throughout a long, and, it may be, a respectable life, but if death finds you upon the wrong side of that boundary, eternity will find you upon the wrong side of that "great gulf" which man nor angel has ever passed. Be not, then, contented

with a religion now, which you will find worse than worthless on the great day of account. I say worse than worthless, because while a course of open sin destroys both body and soul, a course of half religion does worse; for it equally destroys, but it deceives while it destroys, and at the very moment that you are treading the downward path from which there will be no return, it fools you into the belief that you are, step by step, ascending to the towers of the celestial city, but avoiding the toil, and the difficulty, and the dangers, with which all but yourselves are daily struggling.

There may be temporary peace, but there is, there can be, no safety in such a course as this. Some of you have been long engaged in it, and to what has it brought you? You are not reckoned among the decided and uncompromising people of God, you have never desired to be so, you have prided yourself upon your guilty mediocrity; the people of the world view you as half an enemy, because you do not, you cannot, go all lengths with them; you dread their most sinful practices; you have too much light to have much enjoyment in their unholy pleasures. The people of God view you as but half a friend, a friend whose friendship is far more dangerous to the cause of their divine Master, than the avowed hostility of His open enemies. And in what manner does God himself view you? Alas! He sees the whole family of man only in two vast and widely separated companies, as pardoned sinners "in Christ," and as rebel sinners out of Christ! I need not declare to you, in which of these the "almost Christian," has taken his fearful, his appalling stand.

You may, as I have before said, imagine yourself very near the line which divides these widely differing companies; but narrow as that line appears to mortal eye, to the eye of God it is a chasm infinitely wide, infinitely deep, by human aid utterly impassable. And yet, one earnest, faithful prayer to God from a broken and a contrite heart, one firm and decided resolution, inspired by the Spirit of God, to close with the offers of your Redeemer, to devote all that you are, and have, and shall be, to His service, and the everlasting arms shall be placed beneath you, and the healing wings of the "Sun of Righteousness" shall wave above your head, and the power of the Omnipotent Spirit shall be exerted in your behalf, and the impassable gulf shall be crossed, and you shall be not only "almost," but "altogether" Christ's. Will you, then, refuse the offer, will you quench the striving Spirit, will you keep back the rising prayer, and decline the dedication of yourself to Him who died for you on the cross, and now so freely invites you to the arms of His mercy?

Then must all the sin, and all the peril, and all the ruin, rest with you, and with you alone. Upon that great and coming day, when you will yourself be speechless, every friend, every minister must, as regards yourself, be speechless also; they who have so often pleaded for you at the Throne of Grace, must be silent at the Throne of Glory, while the only voice which will break that silence, in accents to you of unutterable wo, will be the voice of your compassionate but neglected Saviour, who will then repeat, "How often would I have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye

“would not.” May God of his infinite mercy grant, for his dear Son’s sake, that this be no longer applicable to any soul among you, but that all who hear me this day, may, by the sovereign power of God’s grace, become not only almost, but altogether, Christians.

LECTURE XXI.

Acts xxvii. 31.

**PAUL SAID TO THE CENTURION AND TO THE SOLDIERS,
EXCEPT THESE ABIDE IN THE SHIP, YE CANNOT
BE SAVED.**

WE have lately contemplated St. Paul in two of the most striking and impressive situations which occur throughout the whole of his eventful history. We are to-day to behold him in one differing most widely from these, and, indeed, from all his former trials, and yet affording an example of entire confidence in God, of devotedness to the service of his Lord, of holy contempt of death, which leaves far behind it all the instances of unsanctified courage with which the history of the world is replete, and is not exceeded by any thing to be met with in the history of the church: I allude to the account of his shipwreck and deliverance, narrated in the chapter from which the text is taken. To introduce the subject, it will only be necessary to remind you that St. Paul, finding he had no certainty of obtaining justice at the tribunal of Festus, exercised the right which he enjoyed, in common with every citizen of the Roman empire, of carrying his cause before the highest court of judicature in the kingdom, and appealed unto Cesar. This appeal having once been made, it appears that no inferior authority had the

power of reversing it; and, accordingly, we find Agrippa, at the close of the examination which we considered in the last lecture, acknowledging, "this man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cesar." Orders were, consequently, given that St. Paul, together with St. Luke, who was his constant companion, and who relates the story, should be conveyed to Rome, for which purpose they were placed under the immediate command of Julius, one of the centurions of Augustus' band; and a vessel having been prepared for their reception, as well as for that of other prisoners bound to the same city, they sailed for the shores of Italy. The weather, which had been prosperous at the commencement of the voyage, soon became overcast; a violent wind arose, before which they were driven in a state of the greatest helplessness and danger for many days. During this period, the sun was obscured, the stars did not give their light, and in those early times, when navigation was wholly dependent upon the observation of the heavenly bodies, such a state of things could not but be one of the greatest uncertainty, if not of imminent peril. For three days all was darkness and confusion, "the tackling of the ship" was cast out, every thing not absolutely essential to their immediate safety was thrown overboard, and still the storm increased, and the helpless vessel was driven before the wind, her timbers creaking, her masts bent before the gale, every human aid so utterly ineffectual, that the inspired historian himself declares, "All hope that we should be saved was then taken away." Probably none who have not witnessed such a scene, and been partakers of its

sufferings, can adequately conceive its horrors. To read of such things, to hear of such things, and to be ourselves partakers of them, are widely different; to stand upon the deck of some distressed and lonely vessel while she struggles in convulsive throes with the overpowering elements; to see her one moment at the top of the wave, higher than the highest point of her mast, at the next, in the hollow below, entombed as it were between those mountain waters; to think of the mere plank between us and eternity, and to calculate upon the fearful prospect that each struggle will be her last, and that she cannot long survive the unequal contest; such a scene, united to all that is most distressing to human nature, the shrieks of the timid, the unavailing shouts for succour, the moans of the desponding, the mingled prayers and curses of those who see the hand of God at such an hour, and of those who see it not, may well be imagined to fill even the heart of a Christian with no ordinary sensations. Precisely such a scene was, in this eventful period of his history, witnessed by St. Paul. For many days he appears to have maintained the silence which became the awfulness of his situation, and the momentary prospect of an opening eternity. At the end of this time, "after long abstinence," probably preparing himself by prayer and fasting for the remarkable office to which the providence of God, and the positive command of his Lord, now called him, he "stood forth in the midst of them," and thus addressed his despairing shipmates: "There stood by me this night, the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Cesar; and lo! God hath given thee all them

that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

How strikingly instructive, as well as deeply interesting, is the whole of this incident! Consider only who this was who thus took upon himself, at a moment of such awful interest, to stand forth, and alone direct the efforts and allay the fears of his companions. Not the captain of the vessel, not the pilot, not the centurion; but, among this ship's company of two hundred and seventy souls, a poor obscure prisoner alone is found to stand forth at this solemn hour, to direct, to counsel, to encourage, and, in the end, to command all around him. And think you this was the natural effect of Paul's energy of character, of his courage, and wisdom, and presence of mind? No! it was simply because he was a Christian; because he was the consistent, faithful follower of Him who said to His people of old, "Only be thou strong and very courageous, for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." It is in times like these that the Christian character shines brightly forth, that its marked superiority is "seen and read of all men," and that the true believer in his God enjoys a calmness and composure, and a self-possession, which the world would gladly borrow, and of which its vulgar courage is but the poor and imperfect counterfeit.

Let us, for a moment, examine still more narrowly the remarkable particulars of this astonishing incident. "There stood by me this night, the angel of the Lord!" What can separate us from the love of God? What can remove us beyond the reach of His

directing and consoling presence? St. Paul, in this tempest-beaten vessel, with neither sun nor star to shine upon him, is not beyond the reach of the rays of the Sun of Righteousness. Well did David say, "If I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." In all probability, no human being in that vessel could form a conjecture where they were, or whither they were bound, during this raging tempest, yet does the angel-minister of God wing at once his unerring way across those dark waters, and find himself, at God's bidding, by the side of the poor helpless prisoner whom he was sent to comfort and encourage! What a transition for that angel of light, from the radiant courts of the heavenly mansions to the dark hold of this convict ship; yet such is their love and their obedience, that we cannot doubt that he was happier while thus performing the will of his heavenly King, than the happiest child of earth amidst the highest of his unhallowed pleasures. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven!" And is there no comfort to the Christian to be derived from this affecting incident of our history? Surely, brethren, it is replete with encouragement to yourselves. Learn from it, first, this great and blessed truth, that you cannot be in any situation of danger, in any circumstances of despondency, or affliction, or trouble, however deep, however dark, from which the presence of your God and Saviour can be excluded. Wherever you are, however troubled or oppressed, if you are a believing, praying child of God, there will He visit you, there will He stand by you, there will He deliver you: the hovel

of the poor; the cell of the prisoner, the hold of the convict ship, have, doubtless, as often been illumined by the presence of our God, as the mansions of the great, or the palaces of princes. If you can say of Christ, "His I am, and Him I serve," be assured that Christ will say of you under all circumstances, "I am his, and him will I deliver."—In the instance before us, however, the promise was far greater than that of personal deliverance. "Lo! God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." Not only would the Almighty save His own, but, for his sake all his companions! How remarkable an instance of the abounding mercy of our God! For the sake of one poor prisoner who believed, does God deliver a whole ship's company of unbelievers: "God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." How little could the heathen crew understand or estimate the cause of their preservation. Yet has this been, from the beginning, the merciful method of God's dealing with His people. For the sake of those of God's children who were mingled with the Amorites, their destruction was postponed for centuries. For the sake of ten righteous men, God would have spared Sodom. For the sake of Lot, God *did* spare Zoar, which He had condemned to the same judgment as the other cities of the plain. In these cases, it is distinctly revealed to us that such was the fact; in how many more cases a similar preservation has been extended, and from a similar cause, eternity only can disclose. But this the Christian will not doubt, that if our heavenly Father, in looking down upon a country which profanes His Sabbath, despises His word, neglects Himself, dishonours His Son, can feel any sentiments

of love to such a country; if he spare it, while neighbouring nations suffer; if His avenging hand fall lightly there, while it sweeps into perdition thousands in other quarters of the globe; we may, from all the analogy of Scripture, and from all the attributes of God, humbly believe that it is for the sake of His own purchased and "peculiar people" who dwell in the midst of that sinful and adulterous generation. Yes, brethren, we most firmly believe that the mercy which has been extended to this our country during the late visitation,* is to be attributed, instrumentally, to the prayers, and fastings, and cries of God's people. If this be superstition, then was it either superstition or the grossest mockery to fast, and to cry, and to pray at all; for it is not easy to understand the mind of that man who would perform all these acts, avowedly for the purpose of averting a specific calamity, and yet, when that calamity is so averted, considers it superstitious to acknowledge that there was any connexion between the cause and the effect; believes that the deliverance was the mere produce of natural agents; and spurns the idea of offering thanksgivings to God for His abundant and undeserved mercy.

St. Paul, having announced to his companions the assurances of safety, of which God had made him the honoured messenger, concludes by giving his own public attestation to the truth of that which he communicated: "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

Do you desire an exemplification of the faith of the Christian, behold it here! The night before,

* The Cholera.

"all hope that they should be saved was taken away;" during the night, the angel-minister of God reveals this purpose of mercy to His servant; and the following morning that servant stands boldly forth, although no outward circumstance had changed, although the wind had not lulled and there was no sun-beam on the wave, though the sea still ran mountains high, and the suffering vessel was hourly struggling more and more weakly with her fate, that faithful servant of God stands forth and speaks, not of hope, but of the most perfect and unhesitating certainty; announces the deliverance of every individual around him, with all the calmness of an assured and settled conviction, and concludes with the simple declaration of a faith which not all the terrors of the deep could quell, "For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Could you, my Christian brethren, but obtain something of the same confidence with regard to the promises of God in Christ Jesus, the great difficulty of the Christian life would be at an end; once really feel that it will be "even as God has told you," that every promise and every threatening will assuredly be fulfilled, and you will be enabled so to realize the things of eternity, that your faith will become "the substance of things hoped for," and you will no longer prefer to them the things which are seen; earth and heaven, time and eternity, will change places in your affections and minds, and from that hour you will "walk by faith and not by sight," and be as far removed from the daily and hourly trifles and follies which now so deeply engross you, as St. Paul was from the terrors which occupied every other bosom and from which he

had been himself so lately but so perfectly delivered. Notwithstanding his assurance, however, time ran on, day after day, and no abatement of the tempest appeared, until at length the sailors, who were evidently not in any degree influenced by the declaration or the faith of their prisoner, determined secretly to take to the boat and to save themselves, leaving their companions to their fate. Immediately upon St. Paul knowing this, he again assumed that position in which nothing but the preternatural aid of God could have either placed or sustained him; and authoritatively addressing those to whose command he was intrusted, said to the centurion and soldiers, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." "Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off."

This is, to many, the most perplexing portion of the narrative. Had not God given to the apostle all them that sailed with him? Had he not expressly promised, "There shall be no loss of any man's life among you?" and now are we told, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." How, then, is the unconditional certainty to be reconciled with this conditional declaration, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved?" To the humble and careful inquirer into divine truth, there is no difficulty in this: he sees at once the whole mystery unravelled, in the simple but unquestionable fact, that the same God who ordained the end, ordained the means. That He who had in His undeserved mercy determined to save every soul on board that vessel, had determined to do so through the instrumentality of the shipmen; and, therefore, had also

determined that they should not leave the vessel in the clandestine manner they had purposed, since the ultimate safety of the passengers was made to depend upon the presence of the crew. It is from such incidents as these, in which the dealings of God's providence with men are so mercifully laid open to us, in which we are permitted to see something of the secret machinery by which they are worked, that we are enabled, yea, encouraged, to reason upon the higher and more mysterious dealings of God's grace. The great doctrine of predestination, for instance, how remarkably is it simplified to our minds by the incident before us; how completely does it enable us to answer all the arguments by which men contend against this scriptural attribute of the Most High. They reason thus, that if the election of God be true, men may live as they please, for as their holiness is not required to promote it, so neither can their unholiness subvert it. There is no doubt that such an argument is extremely plausible; probably few minds, at one period or another, but have been influenced by its fallacy. Whenever it again presents itself to you, call to mind the shipwreck of St. Paul: it will not, indeed, explain what God intended to be inexplicable, but it will silence many a cavil, and satisfy many an humble and conscientious objection. God had pledged Himself that not a soul in that vessel should be lost, and yet St. Paul, speaking by the inspiration of God, does not hesitate to affirm, that if the shipmen leave the vessel not a soul shall be saved. We reconcile this without the slightest difficulty in the manner you have seen; and is there any greater difficulty in reconciling the doctrine of God's

election with the doctrine of the absolute necessity of man's faith and holiness? Assuredly not. We believe that all who are elected to eternal life as the end, are elected to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and repentance unto life, and obedience to God's commands as the way to it, so clearly and so fully stated in St. Peter's first epistle: "Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto *obedience*, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." These conditions are as much and as completely both implied and ensured in the Christian's election, as the presence of the mariners was in the predicted safety of the vessel. God Himself declared in the latter case, that if the conditions were not complied with, the result could not be accomplished: we hesitate not to assert, in the former case, that if the conditions were to be unfulfilled, the event would be different; and we see nothing contradictory in this: we see nothing here which makes the decisions of the Almighty dependent upon the caprice of man; it is simply saying, that if God's decrees are unfulfilled, they will be unfulfilled, for it is as much a portion of those decrees that God's people should be "a holy priesthood, a peculiar people, zealous of good works" here upon earth, as it is that they should be a happy people, a glorified priesthood in the kingdom of their God, in heaven. And not only so, but the truth of God and the power of God are as much pledged for the one as for the other: He has taken both into His own hands as completely as when He answered for the safety of the vessel, He answered for the presence of the crew. He who has purchased an eternity of joy for His people, has ascended up on

high to bestow every good and necessary and perfect gift to His people; their faith, their repentance, their holiness, are all of His procuring, and of His applying; they can now say from the bottom of their hearts, with Isaiah of old, "Lord, Thou wilt ordain peace for us, for Thou hast wrought all our works in us:" they will, hereafter, with the glorified saints above, cast their crowns in deepest abasement at His feet, and say, "Thou and Thou alone art worthy, for Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." Can this view, this plain and scriptural view, lead you to licentiousness, to unholiness, to sin, or even to supineness or indifference to any of the practical duties of godliness? No! if the deepest obligations can produce gratitude, if the strongest feelings of gratitude can ensure love and obedience, then have we here the most powerful persuasive to holiness that ever influenced the heart of man. No hell would be needed for that man who could hate, and defy, and disobey, wilfully and habitually disobey, a Being from whom he believed he had received such inestimable mercies; the presence of his own accusing conscience would be sufficient punishment. While, then, my Christian brethren, you believe, as you are bound to believe, that all your holiness, as well as all your happiness, is of God, and while you "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" at prospects of future blessedness, which no tongue can tell and no heart conceive, labour, pray, strive, agonize to "add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity; for if these things

be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."

LECTURE XXII.

Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

AND PAUL DWELT TWO WHOLE YEARS IN HIS OWN HIRED HOUSE, AND RECEIVED ALL THAT CAME IN UNTO HIM, PREACHING THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND TEACHING THOSE THINGS WHICH CONCERN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WITH ALL CONFIDENCE, NO MAN FORBIDDING HIM.

WE left the apostle at the close of the last lecture, when by God's providence, after the horrors of the shipwreck, he, in company with all those who sailed with him, and whom God had given him, "escaped safe to land." The island upon which they were cast was called Melita, now Malta, in the Mediterranean; and no sooner had St. Paul landed there, than it pleased God, by a remarkable instance of his providential regard to His servant, to bring him into that degree of notice with the barbarous inhabitants of the island, which should ensure their subsequent attention to the truths he might deliver to them. When all had got safe to land, and were engaged in protecting themselves against the rain and cold to which they were still exposed, St. Paul was occupied with the lowest of the company in providing fuel for the fire which they had kindled; and we are told that

“when he had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them upon the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” How remarkable it is, that in the most unenlightened minds, there is still a general sense of the necessity of retribution: a general expectation, although frequently an erroneous one, that even in this world, the wicked shall not go unpunished. Thus we find that while in our Lord’s time even the enlightened Jews could not witness the fall of the tower of Siloam without feeling convinced that they, upon whom it fell, were sinners above all the Galileans; in the case before us, the barbarous Maltese could not behold a viper fasten upon the hand of a poor, shipwrecked stranger, without at once pronouncing him to be a murderer. It is in vain that our Lord corrected this erroneous conclusion in the former instance by His precept, and in the latter by his providence; men are still prone to recognise in great afflictions the invariable accompaniments of great delinquencies, forgetting that, as a general rule, the word of God has declared that, in this world, “All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not.” However this general rule of God’s providence may be occasionally broken, as it unquestionably is, to convince men that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth in the kingdoms of the earth, it is usually maintained. Our heavenly Fa-

ther maketh His sun to shine and His rain to fall alike on all quarters of His field, that the tares and the corn may grow together undisturbed, and often undistinguished, until the harvest; and not till the hour that the sickle is put in, not till the day that the doors of the everlasting garner shall be opened, will this general rule be dispensed with, or the spiritual state of every man before God be fully revealed and for ever ratified. The humble and confiding child of God knows that it is so, and delights to know it—he hopes for nothing, he fears nothing, he expects nothing here below, and is even willing to subscribe to the opinion of the apostle, that, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” He, therefore, waits in the full assurance of hope, for the day when all things shall be adjusted, when every cross providence shall be set straight, when the servants of God, who have laboured through evil report and good report in this world, and have received for their compensation, as their Lord before them, “the reproaches of many people,” shall be acknowledged, and rewarded, and crowned, in that “new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness,” and whence His enemies shall be punished with an everlasting banishment from the presence of the Lord and of His glory. Brethren, live for that day and for that hour! If even the heathen painter could think no labour too great, no pains too incessant, because he “painted for eternity,” will you be satisfied to live for time? With such a day before you, will you idle and trifle away your years, your life, your soul? Will you not rather say, while I will “judge nothing before

the time," but leave all judgment to the Lord, I will strive with others, I will, by God's grace, labour myself to be "approved of the Lord" on that day; I will enter upon no business, I will form no connexions, I will engage in no pursuits which shall hang heavy on my soul, when summoned to the tribunal of my God.

In the case before us, it pleased God, for the furtherance of the Gospel, and of His own great name among this barbarous people, to deviate from the common course of His providence, and to fulfil that express promise made to the immediate followers of our Lord, "They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them:" for we are told that St. Paul "shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm." "Howbeit, they looked, when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly; but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a God." We may truly say that, in this case, the last error was worse than the first; for while we believe that few people could think more disparagingly of the apostle than he thought of himself, we are sure that nothing could be more painful to his heart than the idea that he should be considered by his fellow men as other than a poor, guilty, self-ruined sinner, pardoned by the grace of his divine Master, and labouring most imperfectly to honour and glorify that Master in return.

That mankind are the same in all ages and in all places, in the most barbarous and the most civilized, daily events around us proclaim as loudly as this

little incident before us. The same voices which applaud to the very echo the hero of to-day, are to-morrow rending the skies with yells of detestation and abhorrence; the same man, with the same proportion of good or evil, alike the object of their worthless applause, and of their senseless execrations! If there be a lesson plainly taught us by any of the events of life, surely this should proclaim, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Endeavour to attain to something of that truly scriptural and comfortable feeling which enabled St. Paul to be alike indifferent to the opinion which, at one moment, proscribed him as a murderer, and in the next enrolled him among the gods: an indifference which he himself so plainly and so forcibly expressed, when he said, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self; but He that judgeth me is the Lord." There is, assuredly, no bar more insuperable to our real progress in vital religion than an overweening respect for the opinion of our fellow sinners. Many there are, who never make an effort to "follow the Lord fully," from the dread of this imaginary foe; many more, who having entered upon the scriptural course, like him who "began to build, and was not able to finish," advance for a little season with the people of God, and, unable to bear the adverse opinions of those around them, "turn back again to folly," daring rather to brave the eternal anger of an offended and insulted God, than the momentary contempt of the poor perishing beings by whom they are surrounded.

Many were the miracles which St. Paul performed during his residence at Malta; and although in the very succinct account of the evangelist, nothing is said of his having preached the Gospel there, we do not require to be told, that he who could not spend one night in a prison without delivering the blessed message with which he was intrusted, could not have remained three months in Malta without delivering that same message to very many of its ignorant and barbarous inhabitants. To the seed then sown, may doubtless be traced eighteen centuries of Christianity in that island, disgraced although it has now long been by the corruptions with which an apostate church has there, as in many other of the fairest fields of the Lord's vineyard, deformed it.

After St. Paul's departure from Malta, he proceeded with a prosperous course towards Rome, many of the Christians of which city, when they heard of his approach, travelled a distance of fifty miles from the capital to welcome and to encourage him. The effect of this act of Christian kindness is thus briefly but touchingly recorded by the evangelist: "When the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns; whom, when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." He attributed their friendship to the right source, the tender compassion of his God; and bold as he was and indifferent to human opposition, he was clearly not indifferent to human love, and human sympathy; the very sight of those, who, although unknown to him in the flesh, loved him for the sake of their common Master, and had put themselves to no trifling inconvenience to testify this love,

comforted and encouraged his heart, and sent him on his way rejoicing. It is delightful, from such instances as these, to see that even this great apostle now when drawing near to the end of his course, was still glad to avail himself of the same aids, and to cling to the same human succours, as we ourselves. Although, like God's people of old, he doubtless "encouraged himself in the Lord his God," although he possessed His rod and His staff to comfort him, he was still not above the support of a human arm, the ministering kindness of kindred spirits. We may imagine that we exalt the character of the Christian, and increase the glory of God, by representing it as one of the proofs of exalted piety and high spirituality of mind, to find God all-sufficient for us, and to live, and to desire to live, above the reach of human love, or the need of human sympathy: but this is to be "wise above what is written," and to substitute our own imaginations for the revealed will of our God. He who made us, made us weak, suffering, dependent creatures, dependent not merely upon Himself, but upon each other, for much of our peace, much of our comfort, much of our consolation, in traversing this vale of tears; and, doubtless, He made us thus, that we might educate that peculiar faculty of our souls in time, which should form the well-spring of all our joys throughout eternity. I need not say that that faculty is the faculty of loving and being loved. "Beloved," says St. John, "let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God and knoweth God: he that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." How merciful an arrangement, that that

which of all things tends the most to brighten the path and to gladden the heart of the Christian, should come to us with all the obligation of a command, as well as with all the sanction of a promise. But, my brethren, here we must pause; were we to expatiate upon this great duty, as St. John expatiates almost throughout a whole epistle, we should, I fear, carry with us comparatively few of the hearts of those who hear us; for if there be any one qualification in which the Christianity of our days differs more than in another, and God knows it differs in very many from the Christianity of which we are speaking, it appears to be in this—the deficiency of Christian love. There is much knowledge, there is, we trust, in many, no lack of faith, but there is in all—yes, we fear we must say, in all—a want of the genuine scriptural feeling so often recommended by our divine Master, so peculiarly valued by the apostle of whom I speak, the universal spirit of love; love to the members of the redeemed family of our Lord, simply because they are the members of His family, without any reference to their own individual recommendations or attractions; acknowledging it a sufficient recommendation that they “love the Lord Jesus in sincerity;” feeling it a sufficient attraction that they have His blessed image impressed upon them, and possess something “of the mind which was in Christ Jesus.” Is there not too much of truth in this allegation? Try yourselves for a moment by some of the many rules in God’s own word. For instance, it is a command of that word to “bear one another’s burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ.” Is it your constant aim and effort to fulfil it thus? It is a declaration of that word,

speaking of the household of faith, that if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. Is this realized amongst us every day? Alas! not only do we know little, experimentally, of this blessed duty, but many, perhaps, are scarcely aware that it is a duty, and that these are rules of Christian love laid down by the great Author of Christian love Himself. There is, in fact, a hardness about our Christianity which most painfully distinguishes it from the Christianity of the apostles. We read of the Ephesian and Tyrian converts accompanying St. Paul to the sea-shore, and parting from him there with tears and prayers; we read of these Christians of Rome, who had never in their lives seen the apostle, travelling fifty miles to solace and comfort him, although a reputed malefactor, and in bonds; and we satisfy ourselves that the difference of time and place is quite sufficient to account for the absence of all this feeling from our hearts which formed so prominent, so powerfully influential a motive in theirs. But, brethren, the real spirit of Christianity must be throughout eternity unchanged; like its divine and blessed Author, it is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." If we are, indeed, the followers of Him whose name is love, our conduct towards every member of His redeemed family will be marked by love; we shall, as the beloved apostle expresses it, "not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth:" there will be a universal spirit of affection and tenderness spreading itself through all our intercourse with our fellow men, and realizing, darkly and imperfectly indeed, but still truly and practically, something of that blessed

feeling which forms the light, and life, and glory of the many mansions in our Father's house.

St. Paul, after his arrival at Rome, having made his usual effort, in the first place, for the salvation of his own countrymen, and as usual, having found it vain, turned to the Gentiles, and during two whole years, in which he was a prisoner, "received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him." It was thus that God overruled his imprisonment "for the furtherance of the Gospel, so that his bonds in Christ were manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by his bonds, were much more bold to speak the word without fear." Even in the palace of Nero, the most noxious atmosphere, as we should have concluded, for the growth of divine truth, his bonds were manifest, the Lord Jesus was preached, and, more than this, was received to the saving of many souls: for we find the apostle writing to his Philippian converts, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cesar's household. Not the residents of Rome only, but all the Church of Christ, and we ourselves in this distant, and at that period, dark and barbarous corner of the globe, have abundant reason to bless God for the dispensation which, during the most matured period of St. Paul's Christian life and experience, detained him a close prisoner in the imperial city. Had he, to the end of his course, been at large, occupied, as he had long been, "in labours most abundant," he would, hu-

manly speaking, never have found time or opportunity to pen those admirable epistles which have been in all ages, and shall be to the end of time, among the most blessed portion of the Church's inheritance upon earth. It was from within the walls of a prison, probably chained hand to hand to the soldier who kept him, that St. Paul indited those inestimable productions, the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews; epistles, evidencing perhaps more than any other, the Christian love with which his heart overflowed, the Christian experience with which his soul was imbued, and the energy and zeal for the spread of the Gospel and glory of his divine Master, which could enable him to say that his only hope and expectation were, that "Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death." After two years' imprisonment he was again liberated, and again rejoiced "to spend and be spent" for the glory of God, "the love of Christ constraining him." At this period he revisited all the churches which he had planted, and then returned to Rome, to finish his glorious work in that important but profligate city. It was there, as we are informed by St. Chrysostom, that, preaching the blessed truths of that Gospel which is freely offered to the very worst of sinners, his discourse was blessed to the conversion of one of the concubines of the cruel and profligate Nero. By command of the tyrant, he was immediately committed to prison, and shortly after liberated by the sword of the executioner, being beheaded for the testimony of Jesus.

Most deeply interesting would it have been, could we have heard every minute particular of the passage from time into eternity of one, in the incidents of whose instructive history we have so much delighted. How precious to the Christian would have been every syllable uttered upon that scaffold, every word which fell upon the regardless ear, or was drowned amidst the execrations of the Roman soldiery. Doubtless God has withheld this, entirely in mercy to our weakness. There has always been too strong an inclination in the heart of fallen man to deify his fellow sinners; and if, notwithstanding the total silence of scripture upon these interesting points, every saint whose name has descended to us, has been the object of superstitious adoration, what would have been the effect, had they been all so strongly recommended to the natural heart, and so entirely the objects of our love, as they most assuredly would have been, if such minute particulars as we desire, had been bequeathed to us. It is, however, our blessing and our privilege that we have a remarkable testimony to the dying experience of St. Paul, in his second epistle to Timothy, written during the last imprisonment which preceded his martyrdom. We there find him writing from within the walls of a dungeon in this encouraging and glowing language: "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." "For," he continues, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,

which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." Blessed, most blessed testimony, that the truths which it had been the one great object of his life to promulgate, were sufficiently powerful to sustain and comfort him in death. His was, indeed, the "hope which maketh not ashamed;" no fear, no doubt, no uncertainty, had place in his firm and tranquil breast at that dying hour. While in the midst of active usefulness, he had, doubtless, all the conflict and the struggle, and even all the infirmities and misgivings, which God in mercy strews so thickly upon the path even of his dearest children. He had a "thorn in the flesh," a trial incessant and acute, lest he "should be exalted above measure through the abundance" of his glorious privileges; he had the transitory fear that "when he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway," that he might pray the more fervently, and strive the more zealously to keep "under his body, and bring it into subjection." But all these had now for ever passed away, the thorn no longer rankled in the flesh, the faithless misgiving (if he had ever felt one) tortured him no more. He had always believed, but he was now "persuaded," that all would be well; he stood upon the brink of the grave calm and unmoved, like the conqueror in the capitol, waiting for the crown to be placed upon his brow. The prison and the chains, the axe and the scaffold, were all forgotten; the valley of the shadow of death itself was overlooked, and in the words which I have read to you, the aged soldier of Christ almost appears, before he had put off his armour and laid down the weapons of his warfare, to have commenced the conqueror's song, "I have finished my

course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." My Christian brethren, less of triumph, less of ecstasy may be reserved for you; but, if you are with him of whom I speak, fighting in the ranks of the same Saviour, not less of security and peace. While "the captain of the Lord's host" stands side by side with the boldest champion of the faith, giving him all his boldness, and then blessing and rewarding the very grace which he bestows, He also, the compassionate Redeemer, stands equally side by side with the weakest infant in that "holy army," ready, when his strength fails him, to lift him up in His arms, and to bear him aloft above the danger and din of the battle, and in the hour of nature's darkest peril to make even him, the weakest and the feeblest, "more than conqueror." Live then, brethren, more and more in the love of that Saviour, labour more and more to glorify Him, by every action of your lives, and you shall assuredly, by His strength, be now among the number of those who shall overcome, and, by His free grace and mercy, be hereafter among that blessed company who shall sit down with Him upon His throne, even as He also has overcome, and has set down on His Father's throne, at God's right hand for evermore.

LECTURE XXIII.

Romans vii. 19.

FOR THE GOOD THAT I WOULD, I DO NOT: BUT THE
EVIL WHICH I WOULD NOT, THAT I DO.

HAVING now concluded the history of St. Paul, every portion of which has proclaimed him to be the very chief of the apostles, eminent alike in all spiritual gifts and Christian graces, let us, on the present occasion, behold him, not on the high eminence upon which he stands as the great apostle of the Gentiles, but in the lowly walk of the Christian's private life. Let us follow him to his home, and to his closet; let us see him upon his knees before God in private, and hear him pouring forth the humiliating confessions, and acknowledging the internal conflicts and struggles, which prove that, with all his high and holy privileges, he was still, like ourselves, the feeble, fallen, sinning child of sinful parents.

The seventh chapter of his epistle to the Romans will present the apostle to us precisely in the situation to which I have referred, and will, by God's grace, minister greatly to the comfort, and encouragement, and edification of the believer, by convincing him that there is no difficulty under which he labours, no conflict in which he engages, that was not fully understood and experimentally known by St. Paul. For in this chapter we find recorded, at greater

length than in any other part of sacred writ, the struggle which is perpetually maintained in the renewed heart of every child of God, between the new principle of good which has been implanted by the Spirit of God, and the old principle of evil which has been derived from our first and sinning parent, Adam.

St. Paul, having dwelt upon this painful but deeply interesting subject through many verses, sums up the matter in these words: "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find, then, a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members."

In speaking of this passage, as developing the Christian experience of St. Paul, I am aware that I am differing from some very learned and excellent commentators, who maintain that in these verses the apostle has no intention of referring to himself; that so far from St. Paul here speaking in his own person, he does not speak in the person of any regenerate or renewed Christian; that although he expresses himself, in the passage before us, in the first person, he is either putting himself in the imaginary position of the unregenerate man, or else speaking of himself, and of his feelings as they existed when he was the unconverted Pharisee, and not as he was when writing this epistle, the enlightened and holy apostle

of the Lord Jesus. If this opinion be true, and if, in the text and its context, the writer be speaking in the person of Saul the unconverted, and not of Paul the apostle of the Lord, then, indeed, we grant that the passage is wholly inapplicable to the purpose for which we have this day produced it. It can no longer be supposed to afford scriptural views of the Christian experience of the believer, or to comfort him under spiritual trials by the example of the children of God; it must, therefore, be left as a remarkable anomaly in the word of God, inexplicable and unintelligible; since, as we shall endeavour to demonstrate, if it speak of the natural man, it attributes feelings to the natural heart, and sentiments to the natural mind, differing most widely from all that are elsewhere attributed to them in the word of God, and established by our own experience.

We proceed to prove this from the passage before us. We find the writer, then, in the fifteenth verse, thus expressing himself: "That which I do, I allow not:" meaning, "When I oppose the commands of God by my conduct, I feel that I am acting wrongly, and I allow it not; even while I do it, I confess that I ought not to do it." Now so far we believe the experience before us might possibly be that of an unconverted man; we believe that there are many living in the world, and entirely of the world, who could unite thus far. We have heard men of the world make very similar acknowledgments, and appear almost to think that the confession itself was sufficient to satisfy God for the dereliction confessed. We know that even a Heathen poet made a very similar confession, when he declared, "I see better things and

approve them, but I follow the worse." When the apostle concludes the verse by saying, "But what I *hate*, that do I," declaring that he actually abhorred those sins into which he was occasionally and most unwillingly beguiled, then, indeed, we begin to doubt whether the unconverted man of the present day, or the Heathen of old, could accompany him in the confession. But when, again, upon proceeding still further, to the twenty-second verse, we find him declaring, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man," all doubt immediately vanishes, and we are convinced that no unconverted man since the world began, however amiable, however averse from the grosser sins, has been enabled to speak or to feel thus. Brethren, I am satisfied to refer the argument to your own consciences and your own experience. Were you able to "delight in the law of God" while in the state in which you were by nature? Could you say, while in this state, or, if you are still in this state, can you say, that when you read our Lord's spiritual explanation of the law of God, that an angry word is murder, that an unchaste look is adultery, that a covetous desire is theft, you acknowledge, and delight to acknowledge, or as the original word may be translated, feel a real pleasure or complacency in so strict, so holy a law as this, for the guide and direction of your life? Is there any portion of this law of holiness, of self-denial, of purity, of hatred to sin, of love to the Redeemer, that thus really delights you, if you are still unrenewed in the spirit of your mind, or that did delight you, before your hearts were changed by the Spirit of God? The question itself almost involves a contradiction and an absurdity: for if these things were

really delightful to your natural heart, then would all change have been unnecessary; then would your hearts have been, by nature, all that God could have desired, and all that the Spirit of God could wish to make them; and instead of that total change of heart and affections with which, from one end to the other, the word of God is replete, it is evident that the great work of the Spirit of God would be, not to change, but to preserve from change, such spiritual and rightly judging hearts, to maintain them precisely in the condition in which they were by nature formed; and as you already delighted in God's perfect law, merely to keep alive within your bosom so pure, so holy, so desirable a sentiment. I need not tell the Bible Christian, who knows that he "must be born again," or the Church of England Christian, whose Articles have told him that he is "very far gone from original righteousness"—I need not tell such persons that the reverse of all this is the fact. No, brethren, you must blot out for ever from the word of God that declaration which says that the natural heart is "desperately wicked," and blot out from the memories of the children of God the feelings, and pursuits, and actions of their own lives, before you can teach them to believe that the apostle spake in the person of the unconverted, when he said that he "delighted in the law of God after the inward man." I will, therefore, only add, to what appears to me so conclusive, the further testimony of St. Paul in the closing verse of the chapter, when he says, "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." The expression, "I myself," is so different from any expression which the apostle ever

uses when speaking, as we allow he often does, in the person of another, that I think it might be permitted to determine the whole matter, and to prove that throughout this passage he speaks of himself as he then was, a truly converted and regenerate person, and yet continually subjected to the struggle for ever going forward in the renewed heart between the two opposing principles of good and evil.

Believing, then, that the verses before us truly describe the spiritual conflicts of the real children of God, we have in them the most unquestionable evidence that Christian perfection, although it is to be continually longed for, prayed for, striven for, during the whole course of our lives, is not, cannot be, actually attained, until we shall join "the spirits of just men made perfect in the kingdom of our Father." The sanctification of the believer is, in fact, a constantly progressive work, never perfected here on earth, but daily and hourly growing, advancing, maturing, by the work of God's good Spirit, in the heart throughout every mile of the Christian's pilgrimage. This will explain to you one of the great distinctions between our justification and our sanctification. Our justification proceeds simply from our being "in Christ," "not having our own righteousness," but having "the righteousness which is of God by faith," the imputed righteousness of the Redeemer placed upon us, and for his sake, being "*accounted* righteous"* before God. While, on the other hand, our sanctification proceeds from the work of the Spirit of God within our hearts, enkindling in them holy affections and desires, and leading us onward to de-

* See Eleventh Article of our Church.

light in God's law, and to strive after an increasing conformity to His will and His ways. The consequence of this distinction is, that our justification is complete and entire at once, so complete and so entire that no after deeds of holiness can make any addition to it: our sanctification is, on the contrary, most incomplete at the commencement of the Christian course, and never perfected until, as we have seen, it is perfected amid the perfections of our Father's house. Archbishop Leighton has so beautiful a passage on this subject, that I shall introduce it here as a good preparative to our farther consideration of the subject before us. "The sun," says this eminently holy man, as well as admirable divine, "the sun is perfectly luminous, but the moon is but half enlightened; so the believer is perfectly justified, but sanctified only in part. His one half, his flesh, is dark; and as the partial illumination is the reason of so many changes in the moon to which the sun is not subject at all, so the imperfection of a Christian's holiness is the cause of so many waxings and wanings, and of the great inequality in his performances; whereas, in the mean while, his justification remains constantly like itself: *this* is imparted, *that* is inherent."

We proceed to consider the lesson to be derived to the believer from the remarkable state of mind of which the apostle has bequeathed us so instructive an outline. We learn from it, that even in the most advanced state of the Christian here on earth, there are still the remains of indwelling corruption, endeavouring to turn him back, and to draw him aside from the path of duty; tempting him to neglect the good

which he is conscious he ought to perform, and to commit the evil which he is as conscious he ought to avoid. Every day, and almost every hour of every day, is this struggle going forward, some unholy desire, or improper temper, or hasty or uncharitable expression, convincing him how much there is yet to uproot, and to subdue, and to cast out: some higher degree of spiritual light and life presented to him in the word of God, some faint glimpse, some partial feelings of those heights of heavenly-mindedness to which he has not yet ascended, wrought in him by the Spirit, and by their transitoriness convincing him how much there is yet to attain and to seek after; and by their loveliness leading him to strive more ardently than ever for their attainment. Even in his holiest and happiest moments he is conscious of this humiliating truth, and the word of God is seldom heard, and the house of God seldom entered, and the day of God seldom passed, without adding fresh proofs, mortifying, humbling proofs, that he has "not yet attained, neither is already perfect." Thus there is a perpetual struggle between the principles of good and evil going forward within his heart; sometimes a momentary triumph elevates his hopes, and then again a disgraceful defeat casts him as low as ever in the dust. Yet, blessed be God, though a painful and often a discouraging warfare, it is not an uncertain one; the word of our great Leader is pledged to us that He will "bruise Satan under our feet shortly;" still are there many battles to be fought, and many victories achieved, before the word of our God shall be fully and for ever verified. We would, then, inquire, my brethren, are you conscious of any thing of the nature of these con-

flicts going forward in your own hearts? If you are not, it must proceed from one or other of these causes : you must either have attained to such lofty degrees of Christian perfection as to be above their reach, to dwell in so high and so pure an atmosphere, that these things cannot enter ; or, you must be so unconscious of the power of any spiritual influence, that with you there is no conflict, because the principle of evil reigns unopposed and undisturbed within your bosom. The first of these St. Paul distinctly disavows for himself, when he says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." We cannot, therefore, suppose that many among you are in the enjoyment of that which was not vouchsafed even to this chief of the apostles. While, on the other hand, we would willingly hope that none here present can plead guilty to the second ; for if there be an appalling state in which to meet the eye of a holy, and heart-searching, and jealous God, it is that of the careless, thoughtless sinner going on recklessly and contentedly in a course of God-forgetting indifference, pleased with every trifle, delighted with every enjoyment of earth, but possessing no one desire after holiness, and no one anxiety to ascertain his state before that God who shall "come to be his Judge."

To neither of these classes do I now address myself, because my subject leads me to a third and very different order among you : I address myself to you who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious;" who have been led to hate, and, as far as possible, to forsake your sins ; and who have no wish so near your hearts as to approve yourselves before God, and to honour your high calling in Christ Jesus by a holy

and consistent walk and conversation. It is to you a pain and a grief which you can ill express, that there is still so much of daily dereliction of duty, so much of constant short-coming and continual defect in every part of your Christian character. You have, indeed, been taught by God's Holy Spirit to delight in the law of God in the inward man, and you are unceasingly desirous to honour and obey that law as a rule of life, though you look to it neither for pardon nor acceptance: but then the other law in your members is waging perpetual warfare against the law of your mind, and by its frequent triumphs over your good intentions and holy resolutions, "bringing you into captivity to the law of sin which is in your members." The example, then, of the apostle will administer comfort, scriptural comfort, to your souls. Are you thus perpetually harassed by sins of infirmity? The greatest apostle, the holiest saint who ever lived, acknowledges the same. Do you find that the more assiduously and the more prayerfully you strive after perfection, the more conscious you are of imperfection: I do not say, the more imperfect you are, but the more conscious you are of the imperfection, which, although decreasing, still remains? The great apostle of the Gentiles confesses that he felt precisely the same. Does your progress in holiness fall far, very far, short of your desire after holiness? so did St. Paul's; "the will was present with him, but how to perform that which was good he found not." Let the reflection, then, that one of the most holy, best beloved, and most honoured servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, experienced all that you experience, and yet was enabled, by divine grace,

to fight the good fight and to attain the crown, encourage you in the same holy course, and send you on your way comforted and rejoicing. But, brethren, be careful that none among you appropriate a comfort to which you are in no degree entitled. It is possible to extract poison from the sweetest flowers which grow in the garden of God. It is possible for the heart to be so blind as to say, even while indulging in wilful sin, but yet feeling some painful misgivings, of which few are entirely destitute, "This is the conflict of the apostle; this is good evidence that I am a child of God: 'the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak;' I would do good, but evil is present with me, and I may hope that a merciful God will not inquire too strictly into the failings of his poor, weak creatures." This differs most widely, most fatally, from the experience of the apostle. He declares that he hates the infirmities into which he was occasionally led; that the law of his mind was for ever warring against the law in his members, and never willingly or tacitly suffering the law of sin to bring him into captivity, but waging a perpetual, an unceasing, and, in the end, a successful warfare against the great enemy of his soul. He demonstrates twice, in the few verses we are considering, that he was not at all alluding to wilful sins when he spoke thus; that he never for a moment tolerated himself in any, even the least sin, or looked with indifference upon its commission; that it was not he who did it, but sin that dwelt within him; that is, that his renewed nature was, on every occasion, most adverse, most abhorrent to the temptation, and that the remains of his natural corruption, and they alone, agreed to it; while

he was so far from resting quietly under the sense even of this partial imperfection, that the language of his heart is, "O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" and never does he cease from the struggle, never retire from the conflict, until he is enabled, by divine grace, victoriously to exclaim, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Surely no more need be added, to convince the wilful sinner that he has neither part nor lot in the apostle's experience, nor shall have in the apostle's triumph.

The whole subject addresses itself simply to you, who, while fighting the good fight, are, on account of your remaining infirmities, sometimes like God's people, the Israelites of old, "much discouraged because of the way." To you, by God's blessing, it will minister consolation, to know that if the foundation of your spiritual house be laid deep in the Rock of Ages, although its superstructure be not that perfect building which you could desire, and for which you daily pray, and after which you are daily and hourly striving, it still shall stand amid the wreck of elements; and shall be preserved when, seeing as man sees, and judging as man judges, and speaking as man speaks, many a fairer edifice, founded on the sand, shall be swept away for ever. Your confidence is this: "Faithful is He who has promised, who also will do it." Under every feeling of sin committed, go again and again to the blood of sprinkling, praying for that repentance which is itself the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, and seeking that pardon which He never denies to the truly contrite and believing

sinner; for be assured that, until the fountain opened upon Calvary shall cease to flow, no praying, confiding penitent shall be dismissed, uncleansed from its healing streams; and while you there obtain pardon for what is past, you shall also receive strength fully commensurate with every conflict and every struggle that awaits you: only be careful to allow yourself in no sin: to strive with equal vigilance and prayerfulness against the smallest, as against the most flagrant transgression; and the time is not far distant when you shall be entirely "delivered from the body of this death;" and having washed your robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, shall unite with him of whom we have been speaking, in saying, "Thanks be unto God, who hath given us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

LECTURE XXIV.

Galatians vi. 10.

GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD GLORY, SAVE IN THE
CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

THIS is a remarkable sentiment, differing as widely, and as entirely from any thing to be met with in the whole range of uninspired literature, as it does from the daily conviction and feeling of unregenerate man. It was delivered by one whose life and conversation we have lately considered; and from the peculiar manner in which it is ushered in, and the remarkable energy with which it is expressed, we cannot but feel that it must be well worthy of our most careful investigation.

Let us, then, seek for the promised aid of God's Holy Spirit, while dwelling upon so striking a portion of the divine word, that we may each and all be led to participate in a feeling which this great apostle evidently considered as his highest privilege, and his chiefest boast.

In furtherance of this object, let us consider,

First, What that was of which the inspired apostle was so well content to glory, and

Secondly, Why he would thus glory.

First, then, the object of St. Paul's glorying is thus described in the text, "the cross of Christ."

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In addressing this congregation, I need not caution you, as the immortal Luther thought it necessary to caution his audience, when, in speaking from these very words, he said, “Moreover, the cross of Christ doth not signify that piece of wood which Christ did bear upon his shoulders, and to the which He was afterwards nailed.”* No, blessed be God, the time is past, we trust, at least among ourselves, when such cautions are necessary; the crucifix is no longer substituted for the cross, and in this Protestant country men no longer waste that adoration upon the mere senseless instrument, which belongs only to Him who hung upon it. By the cross of Christ, then, we understand, the doctrine of salvation by a crucified Redeemer, that which the same apostle elsewhere says, was “unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” It was this in which the apostle gloried, it was this for which, while the learned of the world despised it, and the noble of the world derided it, St. Paul gloried, as the one, the only truth worth knowing here below, the one, the only passport to an eternity of happiness.

Let us, then, consider a little more minutely the nature of this great truth, of which St. Paul spake so exultingly, which forms the theme of every good man’s praises upon earth, which shall occupy his

* See Luther on the Galatians, *in loco*.

heart throughout unnumbered ages in the kingdom of his Father.

“The cross of Christ!” O, how do angels desire to look into that high mystery, and yet, with humility be it spoken, no created angel can see it with the eyes with which we see it, or feel it with the heart with which we appreciate it; for no created angel has ever been separated from God by sin, and brought back to His fatherly affection, forgiveness, and love, as we have been, by the cross of Christ. No created angel can say, as the spirits of just men made perfect are represented in the apocalyptic vision to say, “We overcame by the blood of the Lamb.” The cross of Christ is, therefore, peculiarly, of all created beings, our glory, and ours alone. When, as the prophet says, “All we like sheep had gone astray, and turned every one to his own way,” the great and omnipotent God, even God the Father, found out this remedy, and sent His son Jesus Christ, that on Him might be “laid the iniquity of us all.” In pursuance with this resolution of the Most High, did God the Son, in the fulness of time, according to the terms of the everlasting covenant, come, “In the likeness of sinful flesh,” and take our nature: and having become obedient to death, even the death of the cross, thus purchased for Himself a peculiar people, who should believe in Him, and obey Him upon earth, and be for the sake of His infinitely meritorious sacrifice, the partakers of His blessedness, and the sharers of His joy, in the many mansions of His Father’s house.

This, then, is the doctrine, the plain, and simple, and scriptural doctrine, in which the apostle gloried.

And, brethren, this is the doctrine in which the holy men of every age, since the foundation of the world to the present time, although with different degrees of distinctness, have gloried, and in which the holy men of every denomination will continue to glory till time shall be no longer. What, for instance, was the source of Adam's hope? what the truth in which he gloried? Was it not in this, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head?" And what was this, however obscurely shadowed forth, but the cross of Christ? Again, in what did Abraham glory, and what was the truth which brought peace and salvation to his soul? Was it not this, "in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed?" It was especially of this promise that we are told, "He believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness;" and what was this but the cross of Christ? So might we trace the same blessed and glorious truth through every page of revelation, and every period of the church's history, and find in all and in each, whether it be of the church militant here on earth, or of the church triumphant in heaven, but one subject of glory, one note of praise,—“Thou art worthy, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God, by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” Such a truth, so great, so high, so ennobling, so essential to man's best and eternal interests, so destructive to sin, to death, and to Satan, as it has from the beginning been the hope and the glory of God's people, so has it been the object of the bitterest and most ceaseless animosity of Satan, the eternal enemy of God and man. The cross of Christ is a doctrine well known to Satan, that

evil spirit; he heard it from the lips of Deity itself in the garden of Eden; he heard the Saviour preach it in the streets and market-places of Jerusalem; he heard the martyrs proclaim it at the stake; he has seen the dying sinner rescued from his grasp by its words of power; he has beheld the weakest and the feeblest of the children of God depart, amidst pains which rack the body almost to distraction, and yet with the smile of peace upon their lips, and the assurance of peace within their bosoms. And he himself has felt its matchless power, even in his heart of hearts, when the Saviour of the world proclaimed it with his dying breath on Calvary, and saying, "It is finished," set his foot in triumph on that serpent's head, and took unto Himself the everlasting victory. And what is the consequence? That the great effort of Satan has been in every age to strive with all the immensity of his power, and all the profundity of his cunning, to counteract this blessed and omnipotent truth; to set up something, which, while it shall bear as close a resemblance as possible to the cross of Christ, shall possess no one particle of its healing virtues, and its life-giving efficacy. Thus in the days of Papal superstition, he substituted the crucifix for the cross, and taught men to glory in self-inflicted penances, and bodily macerations, and the relics of saints, and the intercession of the Virgin Mother, to the neglect of the one great doctrine of salvation, only by the blood of the incarnate Son. Those days were days of thick darkness, the intellects of men were neglected, education, except within the boundaries of the monasteries, was unknown; and therefore, gross as was the deceit, and bungling the counterfeit,

and miserably unlike and misshappen the substitute, the cheat was undiscovered in the gloom, and many a dying wretch, while he counted his beads, and clung with dying hand to the crucifix, believed that he was on the Rock of Ages, and that, like the apostle, he was glorying in the cross. But time rolled on, and the blessed day-star of the Reformation arose upon a benighted world; and while the heavy clouds were passing away from before the eyes of men, the Devil, with his accustomed cunning, saw the change which was going forward, and knew that if he would enter the lists with his Divine Conqueror, he must change the nature of his delusions, and produce some substitute for the cross of Christ, and the saving doctrine of the Gospel, which the awakening intellect of the age should not so easily discover and repudiate.

Satan now assumed the garb of an angel of light, and produced in the place of the cross, the fair and beautiful image of moral virtue.—Who could have imagined that virtue, the only perfect exemplar of which that ever appeared upon earth was in the person of the Lord Jesus, that virtue herself should have been proposed by the great enemy of souls as the substitute for the doctrine of the cross! We are at first disposed to say, this is impossible; Satan would indeed here be divided against himself; as well might he cast out devils, as propose virtue to mankind, for how then should his kingdom stand?—Brethren, there is nothing contradictory in this to those among you who know the deceitfulness of this fallen spirit;—did he not tempt Eve with knowledge? and is it strange that he should tempt our forefathers with virtue? No: as the dying Lambert exclaimed at the stake,

"None but Christ, none but Christ!" so is the constant cry of Satan throughout all ages, **Any thing but Christ, any thing but Christ.**

This it was which made him substitute a code of moral virtue for the pure and blessed doctrine and graces of the cross. Thus, for years in succession, did he deaden the effects of the blessed Reformation among us, by substituting for "justification by the blood of Christ alone," its one great and saving truth, justification by human merits, justification by human works, by our own poor, miserable performances, which he called virtues; until the religion of this country, and more especially the Established Church of these realms, was so poisoned by this destructive heresy that in too many cases the pulpit contradicted the desk; and when the Minister had read the truly scriptural and admirable liturgy of our Church, confessing that we are "miserable sinners," and that "in the Lord alone have we righteousness and strength," he ascended the pulpit to proclaim the dignity and perfectibility of human nature, the moral fitness of things, and the beauty of virtue, and either omitted all reference to Him whose name he bore, or spake of Him only as an example, whose meekness, and charity, and love, might well bear a comparison with those of the heathen Socrates, although, perhaps, not quite equal to them in uniformity and splendour.

But time has now again rolled on, and with the advancing spread of knowledge, and the increasing stretch of intellect, has come the time of refreshing from the presence of our God, and the outpouring of His good Spirit from on high. Again the cross of the Lord Jesus has been presented to the enlight-

ened eyes and hearts of His people, in all its undorned and native majesty; again the ministers of God have learnt to glory with St. Paul in the cross, and in the cross alone; and again wherever the Gospel is proclaimed with fidelity, and plainness, and truth, there, blessed be God, do crowded, and attentive, and heart-stricken audiences "set to their seal that God is true," and that the cross of Jesus is the truth of the living God.

And now, again, has Satan changed with the changing times; but so widely do the streams of the Gospel flow, and so deeply do its waters stand, and so universally are they within the reach of those who thirst for the living stream, that many and various are the substitutes which he is compelled to adopt, if he would hope to keep pace with the kindling spirit of the times. In one place, where the old leaven is still working, he presents this view of divine things: No doubt the cross of Christ is the saving truth of God; but then beware, that while exalting the cross you do not forget morality; teach men no longer that human merits are the cross, but teach them that they go hand in hand with the cross in satisfying God, and that it is only when they have done their best, that the cross and the merits of Christ come in, to fill up the deficiency. In another place, where such an error would far too palpably proclaim its author, Satan has a widely differing, nay most opposite and contradictory delusion. To these he says, Yes, glory in the cross—it is all, it is every thing; man, poor, wretched man, can indeed do nothing, his holiest works are sin, his holiest prayers are sin, what need then of them? Christ is all, He is

your sanctification as well as your justification, both are alike imputed, cease from "the beggarly elements," to which men would bring you into bondage; the moral law is no rule of life to you, you need it not; the Sabbath has no obligations for you, you require it not; leave it to those who are yet in bondage. Child of God! every day is your Sabbath, the law of love written upon your heart is your law; you need no other for your rule of life; rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ has made His people free.

This is Satan's finished work, this is his crowning artifice, well fitted for the noon-day light, the meridian splendour which is now beaming from the cross of Christ; and this is the phantom in which many of God's professing people are now exulting! how different, how widely different, from the cross of Christ in which the apostle gloried! He gloried in a doctrine which, while it acknowledged Christ and Christ alone as his wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, taught him to "keep under his body, and bring it into subjection;" taught him to delight in the law of God after the inner man, and to regulate every thought, and every word, and every action, by its pure, and holy, and self-denying precepts. He gloried in a doctrine which, while it proclaimed Christ as "all in all," fully sufficient without our poor, miserable obedience, to satisfy the infinite justice of God, taught also that He is "the author of eternal salvation (only) unto all them that obey Him."

This is the doctrine in which St. Paul gloried, this is the doctrine in which we glory: give the plain and scriptural preacher of the cross of Christ a

hovel in which to preach this doctrine, and place it by the side of the most gorgeous temple of the world, where any, or where all the substitutes of Satan, to which I have alluded, shall be presented amidst the splendour of human pageantry, or the flights of human eloquence, or the brilliancy of human wit, and you shall see the hovel crowded with worshippers, and the temple desolate and deserted. Nay, more than this, you shall see the worshippers in the former become, by the power of God's grace, from careless, thoughtless, worldly, God-forgetting men, perhaps even from drunkards, profligate and profane, you shall see them become humble, holy, sober, chaste, self-denying, and obedient men of God; while after all the efforts of human reason, and human eloquence, and human wit, you shall behold the worshippers of the latter unchanged, unedified, unblest. And why? Because this doctrine of the cross of Christ is "the power of God;" because His immutable word is pledged, and His invincible power is engaged, that it never shall return unto Him void, but that it shall prosper in the thing whereto He sends it; the advancement of His own honour, and the salvation of His people's souls.

Having thus considered what that doctrine was in which the apostle gloried, under the appellation of the cross of Christ, I proceed to state,

Secondly, Why he so gloried in it.

The reason was, doubtless, this, that St. Paul had found by blessed experience, that this doctrine was effectual to the salvation of every one that believeth, for it had been effectual to his own.

This was the reason that neither the scoffs of the

Areopagites, nor the presence of crowned kings, nor the chains and fetters of a prison, nor the torturing agony of the scourge, could silence him upon this great subject; in this he gloried, and in this he was content to glory, though all the powers of earth and hell stood in array against him. O brethren, it is easy to learn religion like any other science; it is easy to teach religion like any other science; but to speak to the hearts of men, we must speak from the heart, to glory in a truth which the wise ones of the world despise, and the great ones of the world neglect, to be ready at all times and in all companies to make this our subject and our boast, and amidst the sneers and reprobation of a world at enmity with God, in despite of its laugh of ridicule, and its terms of contempt, to take our stand calmly and fearlessly upon this leading truth of the revelation of God, and say, this, and this alone, shall be my joy in life, my hope in death, my praise throughout eternity, can only be done by close, and intimate, and personal experience of its wonderful effects.

This, then, was the reason that St. Paul was enabled to glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He had been a despiser and a persecutor: the cross of Christ had made him a believer and a friend. He had been the "chief of sinners;" the cross of Christ had brought pardon even for *his* transgressions; and though they were red like crimson, had made them white as snow. He had denied the Lord who bought him; the cross of Christ had taught him to say and to feel, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." With this truth en-

graven upon his heart, he was enabled to live in all holy obedience to the law of God, and yet to despise his own righteousness, and to desire, as a ground of merit, only to possess the "righteousness which is of God by faith;" he was enabled amidst the heaviest trials to call them "the light affliction which is but for a moment; amidst a life of anxiety and sorrow to be "always rejoicing," to look forward to death without terror, and to judgment without alarm: to be able, as the most solemn conviction of his soul, to say, "I would rather depart and be with Christ, which is far better."—Are you, then, any longer surprised that he should say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

In conclusion, let me ask you, Do you know any thing experimentally of this high subject? "Are you able to glory in the cross?" It is one thing not to oppose these doctrines, it is another thing to approve of them when faithfully set before you; but it is a different, a widely different thing, to receive them into your heart in the love of them, making them your joy and hope, your glory and your boast, and to exhibit their influence in your life, by a holy conversation and godliness.

To you, if such there be, to whom these great truths are matters of indifference, or perhaps even of ridicule; who attach some name of contempt and contumely to those who dare avow their adherence to truths in which every patriarch, and prophet, and apostle, and saint, of God has gloried,—to you I would say, We will not argue upon this subject; like the Jewish youths of old, "We are not careful to answer you in this matter;" we are content to wait

until the great and coming day determine whether this be indeed the truth of God, or the shibboleth of a party; we are content to wait, until "the great white throne" descends, and the unnumbered myriads of the hosts of heaven gather round it, and the trumpet of the archangel sound, and his cry is heard, "Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment." We are content to wait until the tombs be broken up, and the souls and bodies of men are re-united, and we stand together, the sheep and the goats, the lost and the saved, before the tribunal of Him, whose name we bear, whose Gospel we love, in whose cross we glory. That awful hour will decide the question, "What is truth?" and will too late convince a ruined world that the cross of Christ, the blood of Christ, the meritorious sacrifice of Christ, and salvation by that, and that alone, was the truth, which, received into their hearts, and its effects exhibited in their lives, would have transformed to them the day of judgment, into a day of triumph, and an eternity of wo, into an eternity of glory.

And to you, my Christian brethren, to whom the blessed doctrine, of which I have this day spoken, is really and experimentally known; to you who have found by happy experience that it is to your souls "the power of God and the wisdom of God;" that it is able to guide you in health, to comfort you in sickness, to support you when you have believed yourselves even in the valley of the shadow of death,—to you I would say, strive far more than you ever yet have striven, labour far more than you ever yet have laboured, to testify, by lives of consistent holiness, your heart-felt gratitude, and to

bring forth the daily fruits of a living faith.—The time is gone by, when men in the plenitude of their ignorance, contended that to preach the cross of Christ was to preach faith without works; but the time is not gone by, the time never will go by, so long as Satan remains unchained, and sin unsubdued, when men will scrutinize with a most jealous eye, and narrate with a most bitter tongue, the infirmities and inconsistencies of those who possess a clearer view of these great truths than they themselves possess; the time never will go by, when the sins of God's people shall be the delight and exultation of the world. Remember, then, that you are doubly, nay trebly bound, to be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" bound by the law of God, which is your rule of life, bound by the love of God, which is your principle of action, bound by the cross of Christ, which is your hope of glory, to roll away this reproach from God's people, and by your purity and rectitude, by your honesty and truth, by your candour and charity, by your holiness and self-denial, to demonstrate that you are the followers of a perfect God, of a holy, harmless, undefiled Saviour.

Thus living, continue to "glory in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ," as the day-star of your souls, the hope of your salvation: the time is not far distant, when the poor imperfect praises with which you strive to glory in it here below, shall be exchanged for the perfect hosannas, the everlasting hallelujahs, with which you shall continue to glory in it throughout a boundless eternity.

THE END.



